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How young people who had dropped out of high school experienced their re-enrolment processes

Gro Hilde Ramsdal^a, Rolf Wynn^{b,c,*}^a Department of Social Education, Faculty of Health Sciences, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Harstad, Norway^b Department of Clinical Medicine, Faculty of Health Sciences, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway^c Division of Mental Health and Addictions, University Hospital of North Norway, Tromsø, Norway

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ABSTRACT

The study followed the re-enrolment processes of six young people in Northern Norway who had dropped out of high school. Early in the re-enrolment process, the participants focused on their experiences with lack of inner motivation, lack of endurance, and confusion concerning what they wanted to do with their lives. Later in the process, participants described positive changes in their inner motivation and reduced confusion about future goals. Their feeling of 'being stuck' changed into a feeling of 'moving forward'. They described experiences with re-socialization. However, a lack of endurance remained a major challenge throughout for several of the participants.

1. Introduction

The once predictable path from youth to adulthood has become much more uncertain (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). According to Beck (1992), young people face a higher demand for specialist skills, making them dependent on their parents for a longer period. In Western societies, the quest for specialist skills has resulted in a vast number of educational possibilities and this overwhelming amount of choices seems to leave many young people with a feeling of *personal* responsibility for their outcomes (Furlong & Cartmel, 2006). Beck (1992) described a globalized society and a capitalism without classes, where lifestyles have become individualized, forcing people to put themselves at the center of their plans. The stability and standardization of industrial society has been replaced by a social landscape where gender and class contribute less as points of orientation and ways of explaining life. Nevertheless, Beck (1992) does not argue against the importance of class as an essential predictor of life chances. He describes social equality as a powerful influence on the individual level more than on the level of group or class, thus making the influence of class less evident (Furlong & Cartmel, 2006). According to Giddens (1990, 1991), in late modernity people no longer inherit their identity based on their social position, and forming and preserving a stable and coherent identity has become more of a personal responsibility. Establishing and maintaining an autobiographical narrative about the self has become the essence of identity (Giddens, 1991). Giddens (1991) stated that such a narrative must be revised according to new information and new experiences to be able to fulfil its purpose of connecting the past with the present and the future. Forming such narratives may be particularly challenging for young people transitioning from school to employment. Some young people drop out of school and are struggling for years to cope with this transition (Mawn et al., 2017). Some find it difficult to connect their past and present with a meaningful future.

* Corresponding author at: Department of Clinical Medicine, Faculty of Health Sciences, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, 9037, Tromsø, Norway.

E-mail address: rolf.wynn@uit.no (R. Wynn).

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In a rapidly changing society, education is becoming a lifelong process (Arnett & Tanner, 2006; Côté, 2000) and is providing young people with the possibility to change their minds about educational choices. Re-enrolling in school is becoming an option for people at all ages (Davey & Jamieson, 2003). However, according to Rumberger and Lamb (2003), most adolescents in industrialized countries complete their secondary education and much effort has gone into easing their transition from secondary education into employment or higher education. Thus, when young people drop out of school, they may risk lagging behind in their life-long educational process. Bynner (2001) found in the British National Child Development Study of the 1958 cohort that at the age of 33, a cohort of early school leavers were still less likely to re-enroll in formal learning. Early school leavers may thus be less likely to be involved in lifelong learning (Dale, 2010). Moreover, not re-enrolling in school is associated with several risk factors, such as greater risk of poverty, unemployment, incarceration, health problems and dependence on public assistance (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). In a study of students who had dropped out and who had later completed high school, 33 % were unemployed two years after graduation, while 45 % of the non-completers were unemployed, indicating a substantial effect of re-enrolment (Rumberger & Lamb, 2003). Consequently, solving the dropout problem must involve finding and re-enrolling students who have dropped out.

The study we are about to present was done in Norway, where upper secondary education (ages 16–19) is a statutory right for all 15–16 year olds since 1994. About 96–97 % of every cohort enters this Norwegian equivalent of high school after completing the 10 grades of mandatory schooling (Markussen, Frøseth, & Sandberg, 2011). The goal of secondary education is to qualify students for work (vocational programs) or higher education (general studies) (Markussen et al., 2011). The county administration has allocated the task of follow-up to a service called 'oppfølgingstjenesten' (OT). OT is responsible for providing employment, education or suitable activity to young people who have dropped out of school and employment. They do this in cooperation with The Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NLWA). The NLWA has a particular responsibility to financially support students who have dropped out of school (Riksrevisjonen, 2015-2016). Evaluating these services in the period of 2011–2015, the Office of the Auditor General in Norway (Riksrevisjonen, 2015-2016) reported that only one third of those who had dropped out of school had received satisfactory assistance from the OT and the NLWA. Moreover, the report pointed to the fact that the follow-up services offered very few interventions for re-enrolling those who had dropped out *in school* (Riksrevisjonen, 2015-2016). Although re-enrolling these young people in education is considered an important task in Norwegian welfare policy, neither the educational system nor the NLWA has managed to give these young people sufficient support (Frøyland, 2017). Consequently, many of them enter into marginalization processes, passivity and eventually disability benefits. Such marginalization processes often involve not being in employment, education or training (NEET).

Wilkins (2011) points out that successful interventions must involve making re-enrollees stay in school long enough to present them with the necessary interventions to help them graduate. According to Barrat and Berliner (2016) more than 1 in 10 re-enrollees left school early and returned to school multiple times, indicating that the schools had not been able to make these students stay long enough to present them with efficient interventions. Thinking along these lines, permanent re-enrolment seems to depend on some kind of support, mentoring or assistance. Studies from Norway have shown that youth that had dropped out of high school and who were not re-enrolled in school or regular employment two to five years after dropping out, described a lack of support and access to material, academic and social resources (Ramsdal, Gjørum, & Wynn, 2013; Ramsdal, Bergvik, & Wynn, 2015). Participants in these studies described how they were left to fend for themselves. The only support they could rely on when facing social or educational challenges were their mothers (Ramsdal, 2019; Ramsdal & Wynn, 2014; Ramsdal, Bergvik, & Wynn, 2018). These studies seem to agree with prior research focusing on the importance of supplying those who drop out of high school with sufficient emotional, academic and social support (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

Various interventions have targeted the NEET population, including educational approaches, vocational approaches, approaches aimed at counselling and monitoring, and service-based approaches (Mawn et al., 2017). In their review of 18 trials, Mawn et al. (2017) investigated the results on the effectiveness of interventions targeting NEETs. They found a small but significant increase of 4 % in employment after interventions. Successful interventions were high-contact and multi component (i.e. both classroom and work-based). Mawn et al. (2017) remark that interventions seemed to have a pragmatic approach combining skills-based classroom training with on-the-job training and did not primarily target important psychological barriers to work engagement, such as enhancing confidence or reducing stress. The relatively low increase in employment after intervention (4 %) seems to indicate that re-enrolling NEETs is a complicated task. One study from Norway targeted re-enrolment of NEETs with mental health problems in particular. The authors found that close monitoring was of particular importance in these re-enrolment processes (Olsen, Anvik, & Breimo, 2019). The Norwegian Institute of Labor Research (ILR) studied alternative qualification measures aimed at NEETs between 16 and 19 years (Lyng et al., 2010). Among the most important challenges emerging from this study, was the fact that 40 % of the participants in the ILR-study were not in employment or education one to three years after the intervention was completed. Half of those who had re-enrolled in education immediately after the intervention was completed, dropped out of school again without completing their education. Consequently, the ultimate challenge in re-enrolment interventions aimed at NEETs is making participants stay in work or education *after* re-enrolment. To accomplish such long-term re-enrolment it becomes necessary to understand more about how such interventions are experienced at different phases of the re-enrolment process. Therefore, we wanted to explore how vulnerable young people experienced the beginning of their re-enrolment processes into education or employment and what their experiences were six months into the processes.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Participants

Permission to perform the study was granted by the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD). Participation was voluntary and

all the participants gave their written informed consent. The participants were recruited from a nine-month re-enrollment program (called 'AFTung') for youth who had dropped out of school. The program included courses on topics relevant to gaining employment as well as courses on life-skills, team sports, excursions, and individual mentoring. The staff of the program recruited the participants for this study by individually asking them permission to invite one of the researchers to talk to the group about her research on school dropout. After the researcher met and informed the group about the study, the staff asked them individually if they wanted to participate. Among the five participants in the program at the time, four gave their consent to participate in two interviews and then made an appointment for the first interview. Later on, the staff recruited the two new participants in the program using the same procedure. The six participants included in the present study were aged 18–22, two women and four men who had dropped out of high school. Some had been re-enrolled in school, some more than once and then they had dropped out again. Four participants lived alone and two with a parent. None of the participants had had full time jobs for more than six months, although some of them had worked part time. Some had never had a regular full-time job. None of them were married or had children.

2.2. Qualitative interviews

We interviewed all six participants two times and all twelve interviews but one were conducted in an office used by the program. One interview was completed at the local University Campus. The interviews were semi-structured. The first interview was made relatively early in the nine-month process in 2019 and focused on themes like how the participants were recruited, their educational experiences, work experiences, hopes for the future, their expectations for the re-enrolment process, their motivation for participating and descriptions of their lives after school dropout, and their reasons for dropping out of school. The second interview took place during the late half of these nine months, during Autumn 2019, and focused on the following themes: What had happened since the last interview? How were they doing? Had they learned something from being in the re-enrolment process? Did they experience particular challenges? What worked and what did not work for them in the re-enrolment process? Had something changed in their private lives? Finally, what motivated them at this stage of the re-enrolment process? Both interviews lasted between one hour and one and a half hour. All participants had a lot to say about their processes with dropping out of school and re-enrolling in school or work. Although some were shy and more introvert than others, they were all surprisingly willing to share their problematic experiences with the researcher.

2.3. Qualitative analysis

We fully transcribed and partly analyzed the first interviews with all six participants during spring 2019. During the fall of 2019, we transcribed the second interviews with all six participants word by word and then analyzed them in the context of the first six interviews. Data were analyzed using qualitative methodology drawing on concepts from Grounded Theory (Glaser, 1992, 2001; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The interviews were read and reread one at a time as they were conducted, thus allowing open coding before the next interview was performed. By open coding we mean describing, 'what is going on' in our data, while staying close to the transcribed wording (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Next step consisted of comparing interviews, looking for similarities and dissimilarities in the open codes to form higher-level concepts. The transcripts were color-coded to make possible the constant comparison of related themes within and between interviews, as recommended by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

In the analysis of the open codings, there emerged five higher order concepts, describing their experiences with the re-enrolment process. The participants were concerned with how the basic problems they had experienced related to the dropout process were addressed in the re-enrolment process. The core category included themes like absence of pleasure; absence of flow, lack of energy, agency, enthusiasm and interests and was named Lack of internal motivation. This higher order concept was closely related to the other four categories emerging from the data namely Confusion, Low Endurance, Moving forward and Re-socialization. The interview content was constantly categorized and re-categorized through the research process, generating memos that helped analyze, compare

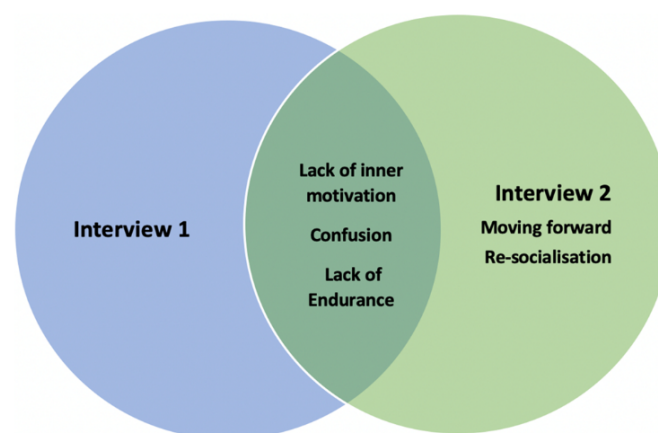


Fig. 1. Categories generated in interview 1 and 2.

and connect themes and categories.

The five main categories emerging from this material were not equally represented in the beginning and the end of the re-enrolment process. Nevertheless, throughout the re-enrolment process there was a focus on experiences with the core category called Lack of Internal Motivation. In addition to this category, the early phase of the process generated categories named Confusion and Low Endurance. The two categories describe some of the challenges that the participants experienced in their school dropout processes and during their inclusion into the re-enrolment process. The late phase of the re-enrolment process generated the same categories as the early phase, but this time participants focused on how participating in a re-enrolment process had influenced their challenges with Lack of Internal motivation, Confusion and Low Endurance. In addition, the later phase of the process generated two new categories called Resocialization and Moving Forward (Fig. 1). The latter categories describe two types of experiences that the informants reported as influencing their motivational challenges in a positive way.

3. Results

3.1. The categories

3.1.1. Lack of inner motivation

Both in the early and the late phase of the re-enrolment process a surprisingly high amount of the participants' statements had something to do with what they experienced as their lack of motivation. Early in the process, however, quite a few of these descriptions of lacking inner motivation were related to their school dropout processes. Some described that even *being present* at school was unbearable:

Being at school from nine to three, I just can't be bothered.

Because being present was unbearable, absenteeism increased. Some indicated that their absenteeism was motivated by their experience of school as totally irrelevant or meaningless.

I was absent from school a lot because I felt that it was pointless

One informant talked about how there was no point in school activities like analysing poems because this was in no way related to this participant's future. Others talked about how teachers never explained why they had to learn particular skills. Sometimes they called these feelings of irrelevance 'boredom'. Furthermore, feeling bored was often associated with falling behind in particular subjects like math, reading, or science, or as one of them said:

It was difficult and that made it less interesting

Falling behind also led to withdrawal and absenteeism. Others did go to school although they could not find the motivation to do their homework and as one of them remarked:

I haven't done my homework since the seventh grade

Several expressed strong feelings related to this lack of inner motivation and talked about being in school as horrible, and said they hated the subjects and described feeling exhausted and drained. Finding school unbearable, some took their flight into gaming alone in their room. However, this solution to their experiences of unhappiness, seemed to bring surprisingly little joy, concerning the amount of time spent on it. One participant said he spent most of his life in his room gaming and then added:

Well, it's mostly about passing time, really. Haven't got much else in my life

Another participant could not think of any spare time activities that gave any pleasure, except maybe watching shows on TV and drinking with friends. Yet another participant said it was hard to imagine feelings of flow or himself being truly happy about *anything*. Two informants were clear about the fact that they had the necessary competence to complete school and explained absenteeism like this:

It's not that I can't do it. It's just that you have to want to

During the later phase of the re-enrolment process the participants also talked about inner motivation, but this time from another perspective. Now, they described how the re-enrolment process had influenced their motivational experiences. Several participants described considerable positive changes in motivation through this process, talking with enthusiasm about new educational or job opportunities. They were using words like 'very exciting', 'great fun' and 'so looking forward to' when talking about school and job experiences. This change in their experiences of inner motivation seemed to be related to other factors during the re-enrolment process.

3.1.2. Confusion

Most of the participants seemed to have negative experiences with school in common, leaving them with little knowledge about their own competencies and interests. They expressed a long-lasting experience of Confusion about their preferences, for example:

I'm just very, very, very uncertain when it comes to what I want to do or work with or become

After they dropped out of school, some took a year off to 'rest up' as they said, but taking time off from school did not seem to make their educational choices any easier:

I was just messing about in my own little world. I just did not know what to do

Often, participants had made educational choices and regretted them because their choices did not work out for them. Some had several of these experiences. Another participant discovered she could not work in this particular kind of job because she had a chronic

disease that reacted negatively to the working conditions and thus she dropped out. Her family's reaction to her dropping out of school was very negative. Although re-enrolment seemed to her to be a smart move in the end, getting a job seemed more realistic here and now. Such dilemmas made choosing an activity in the program confusing and as one participant expressed it:

As long as I don't know where I'm going, I can't see any point in making an effort and educating myself

For some this situation became a deadlock situation, because they were wary to try a placement or a job before they knew what they wanted to do, and at the same time, they could not find out what they wanted to do without making a choice and trying something new. They were eager to move forward but afraid to disappoint themselves and others, including the staff, by making another 'wrong' choice and being stuck again. For all but one, the experiences of 'Confusion' were reduced during the first six months of the re-enrolment process. The participants explained this as due to the fact that they had had a thorough review of their interests, competencies and realistic possibilities, giving them an experience of moving forward with their lives. Most of them had narrowed down their educational and work-related choices during these 6 months. Talking to competent adults including potential employers, in their experience, had given them a better understanding of what they wanted and how to get there, or as one of them expressed it:

Thinking more about the future now. Yeah, cause now I have something to look forward to

Consequently, all but one participant described a development from experiences of 'Confusion' and 'Lack of inner motivation' in the early phase of the process, to the direction of being more hopeful about finding interesting activities in their lives, thinking positively about the future and shifting their focus from 'Being stuck' to 'Moving forward'. Nevertheless, one participant was struggling with the same 'Lack of inner motivation' and 'Confusion' throughout the process: This participant pointed out that the lack of positive development was due to serious personal challenges not addressed in the re-enrolment processes and expressed a need of more interventions related to health issues and social problems.

3.1.3. Low endurance

The participants described how due to their 'Lack of internal motivation', at school and in general, and their confusion as to what kind of education they wanted, their patience and their ability to stay with an activity suffered. Some were unable to complete a specific school year when they realized they had made a bad choice of subjects. Furthermore, years of school failure and/or social problems had resulted in absenteeism for most of them. They described how they coped with boredom, challenging school tasks or conflicts with teachers or peers by withdrawing and increasing absenteeism. Thus, their experiences with hanging in there long enough to succeed with or at least complete educational tasks diminished. Several became sceptical to taking on any kind of challenge at school. One participant described the role of 'Low endurance' in his dropout process like this:

Yeah, I'm sure I could have passed with only E's, but it was such a drag just to attend

However, these endurance problems also affected their thoughts about trying out future jobs or placements. When discussing the possibility of getting a job, one of the participants shared some worries about endurance saying:

I'm uncertain if I'll be able to attend every day when I know that this is not what I want to do for the rest of my life

Because most of them had developed absenteeism in school and several had taken a year off after dropping out, they also worried about coming back to school and work, enduring normal working or school hours. That said it is important to remember that these young people had endured years of what to them seemed a "wasted" education. One of them said they had learned to be in school "without paying any attention to the teacher and just waiting to go home". Consequently, this harsh test of their patience made them careful not to expose themselves to anything they experienced as boring or challenging activities. With one exception, they had all had problems with absenteeism in school and this habit was described as hard to break for several. Even six months into a re-enrolment process they had had positive experiences with, some participants described reappearing problems with getting out of bed in the morning. Although regretting this kind of absence in the afternoon, they were not quite able to break the habit. One participant said about the absenteeism he now experienced at the school he had recently been accepted into:

I could have done better ... /.../ But I don't know why I did not attend a 100%. /.../ Honestly, I don't know

Others had an explanation and talked about how they needed to experience *meaning* in what they were doing and that repeated experiences of failure in school had made them skeptical towards trying again. Some wondered if it would be worth trying an education or a job when they were not sure this is what they wanted to do *for the rest of their lives*. Setting realistic and intermediate goals was not something they had had much experience with. They struggled to feel motivated by the idea of completing an education or getting a desired job, two or three years down the line. Two participants described how they always searched for reservations and reasons for choosing *not* to do something. These prior experiences and mindsets made them extremely sensitive to being left alone in their re-enrolment processes. One participant said the participants had talked about absenteeism in the re-enrolment group:

and we all agreed that we are left to ourselves too much

This participant enjoyed very much being part of a re-enrolment program the first two weeks of the process. After that her interest decreased somewhat because at times there were not enough planned activities and she ended up in front of the computer, just like she did when staying home. She remarked on the subject that:

No, because some days it kind of doesn't matter if I am here or at home

When left alone, participants described how their inner motivation decreased surprisingly fast as their self-doubts and their feelings of 'Confusion' caught up with them. Keeping their hopes up and their inner motivation going seemed to be a main challenge for the participants in the re-enrolment process. According to them, being engaged in relevant activities, experiencing close follow-up from

positive, competent mentors with whom they built trusting relationships, was necessary if they were to have a chance of gradually overcoming `Low endurance`, `Lack of inner motivation` and social insecurities. They also reported on the importance of establishing a personal affiliation with and developing feelings of belongingness to adult arenas like the re-enrolment program, workplaces or educational institutions.

3.1.4. From 'Being stuck' to 'Moving forward'

Six months into the re-enrolment process participants had started talking about experiences of moving forward in their lives due to their participation in the re-enrolment processes. Finding out about their interests and competencies, getting help to contact employers and doing job interviews, trying various working environments and writing applications for schools gave them a feeling of moving forward in their lives. Communicating their experiences of `Moving forward` included talking about their prior feelings of `Being stuck`. Interestingly, they had not talked about their feelings of `Being stuck` during the early phase of the process, although it now became evident that they had harbored such feelings at the time. One participant said about participating in the re-enrolment process:

I felt it at once that I had some kind of existence. Something that I had been lacking before; so that people know I have things to do and places to go

Interestingly, other people's perception of them as `dropouts` was not a topic early in the process, but appeared frequently in the later phase as they described their *progress* in the re-enrolment processes. When describing their experience of `Moving forward` and how things had improved during re-enrolment, then and only then did they include descriptions of prior negative aspects of their self-image, in the form of `Feeling stuck`. One participant described joining in the re-enrolment process itself as an experience of `Moving forward`:

Now that I have a plan it's ok, because it's a bit annoying to be stuck. You have nowhere that you need to be

The participant added that it used to make her uneasy to think about her friends moving on while she was stuck without a plan. This feeling of being lost in no man's land and not finding a purpose in life, was confusing and it made socializing with peers more difficult. However, something had changed after they joined in the re-enrolment process or as one of them expressed it:

I think it is the fact that there is progress in what we are doing and that something is actually happening

One participant described how he was given full autonomy in his re-enrolment process and was offered relevant help to explore his inner motivation and help him understand in which direction he should be `Moving forward`. Stressing the importance of this autonomy-strategy he explained how being able to decide for himself made it possible to take credit for `Moving forward`. He underscored the experience of `moving myself forward`. Advancing from `Being stuck` to `Moving forward` was described with newfound enthusiasm by several participants.

3.1.5. Resocialization

All participants described how they gradually lost contact with their peers when the peers completed high school, and continued into further education or full time jobs. They described how dropping out of school meant losing their most important arena for making friends and being with friends. Several described how they responded by withdrawing into their homes, communicating with peers mainly through the Internet. Re-entering into society thus was a gradual and ongoing process. One of the boys said when talking about the positive sides of the re-enrolment process:

Yes, it's been a bit social. That's good.

Socializing with others who were also `Being stuck` was helpful, because as some said; it made them feel less alone. Some participants were more ambivalent, describing both feelings of relief due to a common fate but also experiences of finally having to realize their status as marginalized and students who had dropped out. Two participants described in some detail how their social skills had deteriorated while `Being stuck` at home. Starting the re-enrolment process, however, made it necessary for them to have frequent conversations with staff members and potential employers about work and education. One participant gave a more in depth description of how these conversations had mattered to him:

It is a nice experience, these meetings with employers. It gives me a chance to practice talking to other people

Talking to other people face-to-face had become a less frequent activity after dropping out of high school. Participants described how the re-enrolment process had supplied them with a supportive context for mastering challenging conversations with adults in schools and work places. Through this support from adults `taking their side` participants described becoming more confident in maneuvering in important arenas in the adult world. One participant described the transformation experienced in the intervention program like this:

When I came here, it was like this: I cannot bear to talk to someone, unless I have to/.../ But then there is this experience building up and it turns into: I can do this!

Furthermore, several participants described how feeling more successful also made socializing easier. Some resumed contact with former friends, some made new ones and one joined a sports club. Moreover, some expressed how the mere act of participating in the re-enrolment processes had positively influenced their socializing skills.

4. Discussion

4.1. Significance of main findings

At the beginning of the re-enrolment process, the six participants described facing three main challenges (Fig. 1), namely 'Lack of inner motivation', 'Confusion' and 'Lack of endurance'. Accordingly, for the re-enrolment process to succeed in the sense of the participants feeling motivated and 'Moving forward' with their lives, re-enrolment had to address these particular challenges. Addressing them would mean decreasing their confusion about what kind of future they wanted for themselves and lowering their fear of failure and thus stimulating their inner motivation to increase their commitment in employment or education. Six months into the process all but one did actually describe that a shift had occurred in their experience involving feeling less 'Confusion' about their future and being more hopeful due to an experience of not 'Being stuck'. Their experience of 'Moving forward' with their lives had stimulated their inner motivation. However, this inner motivation was still described as unstable, making their struggle with absenteeism and endurance a demanding challenge for most of them. Several years of absenteeism had developed into a habit that was hard to break. Getting up every day and attending school or a job placement and then staying there until the end of the day was challenging, and prior self-doubts kept reappearing, challenging their capacity to endure difficulties or distress in these situations. Joining the re-enrolment process also meant being included into several new social arenas, giving them a chance of 'Resocialization' after months or years in isolation (Fig. 1).

When deciding how to make use of the descriptions of re-enrolment experiences reported in this particular study, it is necessary to explore the transferability of these data by comparing them to existing research in the field. Second chance education programs in Australia like Technical and Further Education and Adult Community Education are showing that many of those who re-enrolled in education successfully completed these programs and efficiently transitioned into education or further employment (Dawe, 2004; McFadden, 1996; Phan & Ball, 2001; Smyth, Hattam, & Cannon, 2004; Spierings, 2003; Te Riele, 2000; Wyn, Stokes, & Tyler, 2004). Participants in the Australian programs experienced personal satisfaction in several areas. They experienced increasing social skills and increasing their sense of control over their lives. They felt more able to make informed choices and seek out new opportunities. Forming meaningful relationships with peers and staff was essential in these programs, together with a sense of belonging to a group or 'the building of social capital' (Ross & Gray, 2005). Martin and Halperin (2006) examined 12 comprehensive programs focusing on dropout recovery that were innovative and successful. Although maintaining that there is no 'perfect model' (p. 7), they made a list of characteristics observed in effective dropout recovery programs. These program characteristics had much in common with the Australian programs described above and with the results from the present study. Martin and Halperin (2006) emphasized the use of teachers as facilitators and crew leaders, creating personal and informal learning communities that were relationship-based, and realistic career-oriented curriculums, by accommodating to the needs of local employers and providing individualized education. As in the present study, accessing opportunities for employment and providing employment relevant to the participants' educational programs, were essential factors for success. Another central factor was the optimistic attitude among mentors focusing on positive rewards for learning, attendance, achievement and peer recognition. In line with our findings, Martin and Halperin (2006) stressed the importance of extensive supportive services, addressing barriers to learning and a portfolio of program options to meet the students' needs. Summing up the literature, Zammitt and Anderson-Ketchmark (2011) concluded that successful dropout recovery programs are relationship-based, individualized, student-centered and success-oriented instead of discipline-oriented.

Thus, the data from the present study and research summed up above point to many of the same factors characterizing successful re-enrolment processes. However, one factor in particular seemed to have unanimous support across studies and that was the importance of supportive relationships. No matter how their re-enrolment processes developed, when talking about success factors, participants in our study always focused on the importance of having access to supportive mentors. The same focus on the relevance of relationships as motivational factors in school dropout processes have emerged in prior interview studies with NEETs (Ramsdal, 2019). One study showed that social support was a main factor strengthening participants' intention to stay in school (Ramsdal et al., 2018) and other studies have found 'Abandonment', 'Social Awkwardness' and 'Social exclusion and loneliness' to be the focus of dropout narratives (Ramsdal et al., 2013). According to Ramsdal et al. (2013), the school dropouts described an absence of parents, peers and teachers in their lives, suggesting that attachment problems might be part of the challenges faced by these young people. Reviewing the attachment research literature, we found a substantial support for an association between positive experiences in early relationships and a readiness to socialize with parents, teachers and peers (Ramsdal et al., 2015). This attachment dynamic seemed to be associated with cascading influences into various types of behavior, among them academic achievement, thus suggesting one possible explanation for the participants' focus on the importance of relationships.

However, the participants' focus on the relevance of relationships in their re-enrolment processes may also be analyzed within the frame of socio-economic change and late modernity. According to Furlong and Cartmel (2006), modern societies have changed the life experiences of young people significantly. The restructuring of labor markets has created an increased demand for educated workers making young people dependent on their parents often long into their twenties. These rapid social changes have made many parental life experiences obsolete and thus not relevant for adolescents in their transition into young adulthood. These lines of thinking could explain why the participants in our study were so focused on the positive influence of accessing adults with the competence and connections relevant to their re-enrolment process. According to Beck (1992), these participants live in what he called a 'risk society', where people have to accept risk as an essential part of their lives and as Giddens (1991) stated, not to expect any part of their lives to follow a pre-ordained course. This kind of late modernity makes it difficult to plan for the future (Sennett, 1998). As the participants became involved in the re-enrolment process, they were confronted with the risks of planning for the future while revisiting their former shortcomings to search for new ways of dealing with these personal setbacks. Early in the process, when having to confront

former insecurities, their low self-efficacy and lack of inner motivation was re-activated, manifesting their `Confusion` about the decisions to be made about their future. They had problems believing in their ability to complete school, they were uncertain about what they wanted to do with their lives and what kind of job they were suited for and had few ideas about how to get there. Beck (1992) declared that `risk society` is characterized by the search for `lost security`, where anticipating disasters and finding interventions to avoid them is an important social force. Having to manage their lives in this kind of context, the `Confusion` described by the participants becomes understandable. Being surrounded by uncertainty made it difficult to make important decisions about education and employment. Consequently, they reacted by searching for security through a job or an education that they thought would provide security. Most of them described searching for education or employment options that could help them find "what I want to do for the rest of my life", indicating that they were looking for stability and predictability in a world of insecurities.

Beck (1992) stated that risk has become `individualized` in late modernity, causing people to feel personally responsible when their decisions lead to crisis or setbacks but without being aware of the influential processes outside their personal control. In line with this kind of thinking, the participants described deadlock decision making processes, due to their fear of making the wrong choices. These insecurities were experienced as individual challenges, thus making the solutions a personal responsibility. Several described deadlock decision making processes suggesting problems with developing their autobiographical narratives expressed through their focus on `Being stuck`. Not one of the participants suggested that the school system itself was inadequate or that the transitions between school and employment lacked the necessary flexibility. They talked about their shortcomings as cases of personal `Confusion` or inadequacy. Almost all participants reported that becoming involved in the collective of a re-enrolment process and sharing it with other dropouts and competent supportive adults in a `resocialization` process, reduced their experiences of `Being stuck` and gradually stimulated experiences of `Moving forward`. However, their former experiences of navigating personal insecurities with little social support seemed to have exhausted their capacity for `Endurance`. Thus, the challenging task of building a functional autobiographical narrative was repeatedly disturbed by self-doubt and low stress tolerance when facing new insecurities at school or work. This is particularly interesting since Mawn et al. (2017) found that re-enrolment interventions did not primarily target important psychological barriers to work engagement, like enhancing confidence or reducing stress. Thus, participants` descriptions of their continuing `Lack of endurance` might indicate that re-enrolment processes must be considered a long-term effort and must have a clear focus on reducing stress and stabilizing self-efficacy. In risk society, young people may need more supportive mentoring in their transitions between education and employment. So far, school and vocational training systems seem not to have taken sufficiently into account these social changes.

4.2. Limitations

It is a major strength of the present study that we were able to get comprehensive descriptions of the re-enrolment experiences from the participants themselves over time. However, we have only been able to interview six participants, and they had been recruited from a limited geographical area by the NLWC. This could suggest that transferability is limited and further studies are needed to corroborate the essential factors in high school re-enrolment processes. There is a possibility that six interviews were insufficient to accomplish the saturation prescribed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). One person did not want to participate in the interviews of the present study. Persons refusing to participate may have different experiences of the re-enrolment process than the participants and thus we may have missed descriptions of relevant alternative experiences. Additionally, all participants were recruited into the program by the NLWC and we could not ascertain the precise criteria used to select participants for the program except for the fact that they had dropped out of school and were unemployed.

5. Conclusions

This study followed the re-enrolment processes of six young people in Northern Norway who had dropped out of high school. Early in the re-enrolment processes, the participants stated that they were unsure about what they wanted to do with their lives, and they described a lack of inner motivation and endurance. As re-enrolment progressed, they described being more motivated and their goals became clearer. The participants described feeling more connected and sociable. Their inner motivation increased and they described feeling that their lives were moving forward. Despite these positive changes, several of the participants were challenged by a persistent lack of endurance.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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