2016 cohort

Dearbhla McGrath – Biology Teacher

From Excluded to Exceptional: A Pre-emptive Intervention for Boys at Risk of Exclusion.

This project aims to address poor attitudes to school and lack of aspiration in boys at risk of exclusion through a targeted intervention programme. In a broader sense, the project aims to raise aspirations of these students in order to avoid the significant social costs later in life that are related to exclusion.

The social cost of school exclusion is grave. There is a link between child and adolescent mental illness and exclusion and the majority of UK prisoners were excluded from school. Only one per cent of excluded young people achieve five good GCSEs including English and Maths. What's more, IPPR research estimates that the economic cost of exclusion is around £370,000 per young person in lifetime education, benefits, healthcare and criminal justice costs (Gill et al. 2017).

The practice 'problem' that this project will tackle could be broadly defined as a lack of specific intervention that aims to raise aspirations within this cohort.

Target audience

Students spend one hour a week for 6 weeks in a small group working together on a cross-curricular project (French and English). The focus of each session will be to allow students to develop their linguistic ability and to develop students' capacity to work independently and collaboratively on a shared project and to learn how to discuss and present ideas and develop leadership skills. The focus is also to promote languages generally and, through this, understanding and tolerance of others. The film to be studied has been chosen as the prominent themes in the film such as racism, tolerance and friendship are pertinent considering the context of the school (further outlined below). *Au Revoir les Enfants* has also been chosen as it is on the A Level specification. In each session students will watch part of the film, have the opportunity to question and discuss together and will be given a research task for the next session.

At the end of the six-week intervention it is envisaged that the students will have the opportunity to present their project to the Headteacher and furthermore, students will be invited to visit Oxford University. Dr Hugh Munro is the Access and Outreach Officer for Wadham College, Oxford University and has agreed to facilitate a trip to Oxford for the Challney students taking part in the programme. It is envisaged that Dr Munro will organise for the students to spend the day experiencing university life.

This part of the project aims again to increase confidence within students regarding their academic ability, and to improve students' attitudes towards school and their future aspirations.

Scheme of Work (Content of sessions and independent research tasks)

Session 1: Introduction to context of WW2 France.
Research task 1: Research the French Occupation and Resistance.

Session 2: Introduction to *Au Revoir les Enfants*
Theme: Friendship
Research Task 2: Research the director of the film, Louis Malle.

Session 3: Film analysis.
Theme: Difference / Otherness
Research task 3: Research a holocaust survivor.

Session 4: Film analysis.
Theme: Students' choice
Task 4: Start planning final presentation.

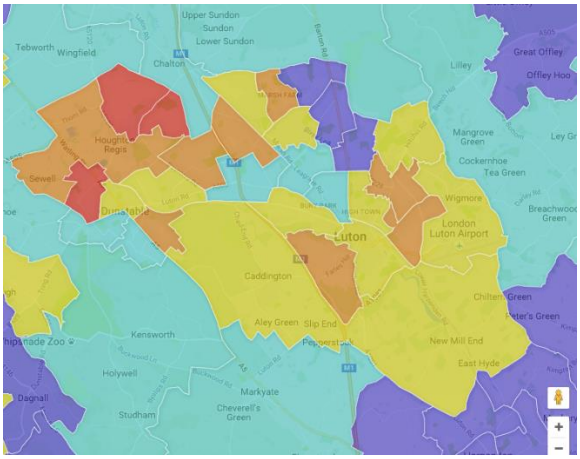
Session 5: Planning final presentation.
Task 5: Work on final presentation.

Session 6: Rehearsal of final presentation.

Context of school

The need for targeted interventions aimed at raising students aspirations is evidenced by the following:

- According to the last Ofsted inspection (2007), "The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is high, as is the proportion of minority ethnic pupils. [...] Attainment on entry is well below the national average with a large number of pupils joining the school after Year 7."
- The demographic of the community that the school serves is mostly Pakistani, Benghali and Tamil.
- EAL: Most pupils have English as their second language and many parents do not speak any English at all. This can cause difficulty in communication between the school and families. 87% of students are EAL, which is very high compared to the national average of 15%. (Anecdotally, this is a possible reason why boys at the school are reluctant to study languages and lack confidence. Of course, this is also sadly ironic seeing as most students are already bilingual).
- FSM6: The percentage of students receiving free school meals is high; 37.6% compared to 29.4% nationally.
- The school's postcode (LU4 9TJ) is classified as being in Quintile 4 for young participation, according to POLAR3 data. However, many of the surrounding areas in Luton are classified as Quintile 1,2 and 3 meaning many of our students come from some of the most deprived areas in the country. See image below.



Potential ethical issues / Negative effects:

1. There is the potential negative effect of 'labelling' boys as 'at risk of exclusion'.

Considerations & steps to avoid this:

The project title could be presented to boys in a slightly more positive way eg. 'boys who are not reaching their potential'.

2. Potential negative effect of grouping 'high-tarif' students together (deviancy training) as outlined by Obsuth et al (2016).

Considerations & steps to avoid this:

On-going monitoring of boys throughout the intervention and liaising with behaviour support workers.

Participants views will be recorded through qualitative interviews at the beginning of the project and again at the end. Through this, changes in their perceptions can be analysed.

A semi-structured interview technique will be favoured as the research questions to be investigated here are somewhat broad and it may be necessary to depart slightly from pre-planned questions in order to allow participants to fully express their thoughts and to allow for participants 'elaborations and digressions'. A semi-structured approach rather than unstructured has been chosen in order to guide participants towards the main topics that the research addresses (Bryman, 2016, 469).

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed to allow in-depth analysis and to avoid bias/misremembering when recalling participants' comments.

Interview Guide

How do you feel when you're in school?

How do you think others see you in school? Peers / Teachers?

Do you think school is important?

Do your parents encourage you to do well in school?

Did your parents finish school / go to university?

What would you like to do when you finish school?

Do you think you will attend university?

Do you think you are capable of doing well in school / getting good GCSEs?

Findings

The project is still on-going but initial tentative findings would suggest that the boys are engaged and enthusiastic towards the project. This, in itself, is already an improvement with regard to their attitudes towards school.

This project is an important step in beginning to target students who are under-achieving, not because of ability, but because of their difficulty in adhering to school rules. Also, this project aims to affirm the importance of languages for our students and encourage them to see studying

languages as attainable and rewarding.

Links between Wadham College and Challney High School for Boys already exist through the Wadham College Luton project. However, it is envisaged that this link could be expanded through this project to facilitate a specific languages link to be developed.

Hopefully, this project will serve as a starting point for the development of a larger strategy that could work across the school for improving selected boys' attitudes towards school, thus helping to raise aspirations and therefore, engagement and attainment also.

References

Bryman, Alan, *Social Research Methods* (2016) Oxford University Press.

Challney High School for Boys Ofsted Report 2007. https://files.api.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/837587

Gill, K., Quilter-Pinner, H., & Swift, D. (2017). Making the Difference - Breaking the Link Between School Exclusion and Social Exclusion, *Institute for Public Policy Research*. https://www.ippr.org/files/2017-10/making-the-difference-report-october-2017.pdf

Obsuth, I., Sutherland, A., Cope, Aiden., Pilbeam, L., Murray, AL., & Eisner, M. (2016). London Education and Inclusion Project (LEIP): Results from a Cluster-Randomized Controlled Trial of an Intervention to Reduce School Exclusion and Antisocial Behavior. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *46*, 538-557. DOI 10.1007/s10964-016-0468-4.

Polar 3 Map of Young Participation Areas https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/polar-participation-of-local-areas/polar3/