

**YOUNG PEOPLE AND POSITIVE ACTIVITIES: THE NEED FOR A  
LOCAL PERSPECTIVE**

**by**

**KATE OLDALE**

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To my parents

for sowing seeds of possibility

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## INTRODUCTION

The research in this volume was undertaken in a large, urban local authority where the challenge of delivering positive activities for young people outside school hours was a strategic focus.

Initially, the idea for this research stemmed from discussions with two young people through my work as a trainee educational psychologist. They reported being unable to access positive activities because of feeling unsafe in the areas in which they lived. As a result of this conversation I consulted the Government guidance about positive activities for young people (DCFS, 2007) and was concerned that the large scale, mainly positivist research that was referred to in this guidance did not necessarily relate to the most pertinent issues for the particular socially disadvantaged area of the large city in which I worked. The youth culture in the area had received negative media attention which may have posed an additional dimension to the challenge of getting young people to engage in positive activities.

The two young people who I had spoken to would also have been unlikely to belong to any target group to whom the majority of resources in such an area would be directed towards. They were not considered to have the greatest support needs by their schools or to be 'vulnerable' according to the definition in the government paper, 'Targeted Youth Support Guide': vulnerable young people are those who experience a combination of factors, such as: poor mental health; learning and/or behaviour difficulties; poor family support; involvement in gangs (DCSF, 2008). It became

apparent that there was a potentially 'invisible' cohort of young people, who did not attract our attention through exceptional talent or challenging difficulties. These young people might have been in danger of 'slipping through the net' when economic restraints meant that supposedly universal interventions were targeted towards those with a higher level of perceived need.

### **The Critical Literature review: Can extra curricular activities help close the poverty gap?**

The critical literature review sets out to critique the largely positivist approach taken a number of studies referenced in the government paper 'Aiming High for Young People' (DCSF, 2007) that investigate the link between extra-curricular or positive activities and better outcomes for young people. A range of epistemological issues are addressed in the review, but particular attention is directed towards positivist assumptions regarding the conceptualisation of poverty in much of the research. The effects of poverty are explored in light of alternative, interactionist theories that broaden the constructions of social disadvantage, demonstrating the difficulty of meaningfully describing such a large and complex demographic in a useful way for informing policy for youth services.

The constructionist stance is further developed through the examination of an alternative set of studies (Sutton et al, 2007 and Wikeley et al, 2007), funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2007). The literature review argues that participatory and/or interpretive methodologies provide meaningful and useful conclusions about the benefits of after school activities and barriers to access. In addition, they better embrace the principles of empowerment, access and quality, which '*Aiming High for*

*Young People*' described as its own.

**The research study: An exploration of how and why a group of young people in an urban area of a northern city decide to engage or not engage in positive activities**

The research study aims to explore how 'typical' young people in the particular urban locality make the decision to engage in activities and whether relative social disadvantage has the same effect upon levels of engagement in this local area as that suggested in the literature.

A case study approach was selected, involving individual interviews with six year 7 pupils and three service providers linked to a sports college. A further focus group interview helped clarify my interpretation of the data. Thematic analysis was used to identify themes and patterns in the data.

Both the critical literature review and the concerns discussed earlier about the potential exclusion of this 'hidden' cohort from resource and research considerations led to the development of the case study research contained in Part Two of this volume in a number of ways.

Firstly, the research adopts an interpretive methodology that acknowledges the constructed nature of experience. This relates to my own interpretations of the interview data during thematic analysis as well as the young people's perceptions and experiences that the research design sought to establish and represent.

Secondly, the research focuses upon the local situation for a particular group of young people, rather than trying to generalise to a diverse population. Indeed, the picture that was constructed from the data reflected a different pattern from the trends reflected in the body of research. This may be due to the particular set of eco-systemic circumstances within which the six young people live. It may also reflect my own influence over the study design, particularly in defining the criteria for interviewee selection.

Thirdly, as stated above, the interpretive design of the study allowed a closer adherence to the stated principles of the government in terms of conducting research that intended to empower and increase access for young people.

Finally, the case study design allowed propositions to be drawn from the literature and these shaped the guiding questions for the interviews. Interestingly, these propositions did not predict the outcomes from my analysis of the data that the case study provided. This led me to reflect upon my own assumptions about this group of young people.

### **Structure of the volume**

This tone is the first of two volumes, which constitute my doctoral thesis.

Volume One contains two parts. Part One is a critical literature review, which is followed by Part Two: the research report. Some final comments are included in the concluding chapter.

The second volume presents five professional practice reports.



## References

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (2007) **Aiming High for Young People: a ten year strategy for positive activities**. Nottingham: DCSF Publications

Department for Children, School and Families (DCSF) (2008). **Targeted Youth Support: Integrated Support for Vulnerable Young People: A Guide**. Nottingham: DCSF Publications



**Part I**

**CAN EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES HELP CLOSE THE  
POVERTY GAP? A CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW.**

## ABSTRACT

This literature review was undertaken in light of recent policy regarding improving access to positive activities for young people. It critiqued a number of studies referenced in the government paper 'Aiming High for Young People' (DCSF, 2007) that investigated the link between extra-curricular or positive activities and better outcomes for young people. These studies used largely positivist, statistical approaches to research.

As well as some broader epistemological issues, consideration is given to the theoretical underpinnings of the research, such as the conceptualisation of poverty as a factor in levels of access and participation. The effects of poverty are explored in light of 'socialisation' rather than 'poverty gap' theories and in relation to how Capability Theory can be used to provide a model of the influence of economic, environmental, cultural and psychological factors upon personal agency and the experience of poverty.

In response to the government's stated principle of empowerment in '*Aiming High for Young People*', a second group of studies that use qualitative methods are critiqued. It is argued that such participatory and/or interpretive methodologies provide meaningful and useful conclusions about the benefits of after school activities and barriers to access that better embrace the principles of empowerment, access and quality which '*Aiming High for Young People*' described as its own.

# **CAN EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES HELP CLOSE THE POVERTY GAP? A CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW.**

## **Introduction**

‘The rising tide of education is not lifting these boats.’ (Ofsted, 1993, p. 1)

Social mobility at the beginning of this century is lower than it has been for previous generations, meaning that those who are born into disadvantage are more likely to stay there (Margo and Dixon, 2006; Blanden and Gibbons, 2006). Simultaneously, the gap between the richest and the poorest in terms of disposable income has increased (Paxton and Dixon, 2004). Children of low-income families are disadvantaged on a number of measures, including: educational qualifications; levels of unemployment or low-paid work; health and involvement in crime (Sutton et al, 2007, Ermisch et al, 2001). Specifically, children and young people who receive free school meals are less than half as likely to achieve five good GCSEs as other children (DfES, 2006). According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the gap between the level of education achievement for young people from disadvantaged and advantaged backgrounds in the UK is one of the largest in OECD Countries (OECD, 2002). This means that poverty and poor educational outcomes are not inevitably linked and that there must be other factors involved that heighten any relationship between economic disadvantage and low achievement for young people in this country.

In its efforts to meet its pledge to close the poverty gap, the government has

identified extra-curricular activities as a potential mediating factor in the association between disadvantage and poorer outcomes. This review will focus upon some of the research that has sought to investigate links between what children and young people do in their leisure time (particularly structured after-school activities) and better outcomes. I will look at a number of studies that reflect a range of epistemologies, raising questions about how we conceptualise poverty and the mechanisms employed to measure disadvantage and other research items. In doing so, the review will ask whether the types of methodologies used by the evidence base referenced by the government paper 'Aiming High for Young People: a ten year strategy for positive activities' adhere to its own professed principles of empowerment, access and quality (DCSF, 2007).

### **The Structure of this Review**

The first section of the review will briefly summarise some of the policies that have emerged since the publication of The Every Child Matters Green Paper (DfES, 2003), to support the government's intention to narrow the gap in levels of achievement between those from differing economic backgrounds. This will include: Sure Start; The Full Service Extended Schools Initiative (DfES, 2005); Youth Matters (DfES, 2005); and Positive Activities for Young People (DCSF, 2003). 'Aiming High for Young People: a ten year strategy for positive activities' (DCSF, 2007) is identified as central to the current discussion.

The review will then critique a number of studies that aim to investigate the link between extra-curricular activities (ECA) and better outcomes for young people.

The first group of studies use largely positivistic, statistical approaches, with increasing levels of reflexivity concerning the epistemological assumptions made and the socio-political context of the work. Most of these studies were used as sources in the 'Aiming High for Young People' paper, including: Eccles et al's 2003 paper, '*Extracurricular Activities (ECA) and Adolescent Development.*', Feinstein and Robson's report, '*Leisure Contexts in Adolescence and their Effects on Adult Outcomes*' (2005) and Margo and Dixon's '*Freedom's Orphans*', a report produced by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), published in 2006. A study by Fleming et al (2008) will also be discussed.

As well as some broader epistemological issues, consideration will be given to the theoretical underpinnings of the research, in particular with regards to the conceptualisation of poverty as a factor in levels of access and participation. The effects of poverty will be explored in light of 'socialisation' rather than poverty gap theories and in relation to Capability Theory, as described in Margo et al (2006) in *Freedom's Orphans*.

In response to some of the issues raised by positivist approaches and in light of the government's stated principle of empowerment in Aiming High for Young People, a second group of studies using qualitative methods is considered. Sutton et al's (2007) paper, 'A child's-eye view of social difference' is presented as an alternative, participatory study, mainly continuing the theme of how poverty is conceptualised, while making some reference to children's views about after school activities.

Finally, Wikeley et al's (2007) study is critiqued as an exploratory, qualitative

approach with some basis in critical theory. It is argued that this study is able to combine a number of features of the other research, achieving a balance that enables meaningful and useful conclusions about the benefits of after school activities while largely embracing the principles of Aiming High for Young People.

## **The Policy Context**

A number of policies have been put in place to try to address the growing achievement gap between young people from different socio-economic backgrounds in England. Some policies that have emerged since the introduction of the Government's Green Paper, *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003) are briefly described here to give some context to the review:

*Sure Start*: This programme was launched in 1998 and aimed to help to reduce child poverty by focussing resources where they were most needed according to deprivation levels. Its main aims were to ensure that children were ready to succeed at school by providing support from birth to four years old for children and their families (DfES, 1998). The children's centres achieve this through integrated early learning and childcare, and quick and easy access to wider services, such as Health and Employment. Evaluation of the programme shows modest but positive effects for families (NESS/2008/sf/027).

*The Full Service Extended Schools Initiative* (FSES) was launched by the Department for Education and Skills (dfes) in 2003 and aims to provide structured provision beyond the ordinary school day, engaging pupils, their families and communities. In June 2005 the DfES announced a 'core offer' of extended services

that all children should have access to, through their local school, by 2010 (DfES, 2005). This should include:

- A menu of activities, including study support and homework clubs, sport, music, arts and special interest clubs, combined with formal, 'wraparound' childcare in primary schools;
- Parenting and family support, including family learning;
- Swift and Easy Access to targeted and specialist services (for example, speech and language therapy, behaviour support);
- (If appropriate) community access to school facilities such as sports'

DCSF, (2008)

Other initiatives have included: Education Action Zones, Excellence in Cities and Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances, all designed to increase the engagement of young people in education according to the principles set out in Every Child Matters.

Improvement in the achievement level of those from disadvantaged backgrounds has been slow and unsteady, with better results in the Primary sector (Bell, 2003) Ofsted identified the need to recognise levels of achievement as well as attainment when evaluating school and pupil performance if these initiatives are going to be valued in a target driven culture.

More recently, a number of policies and initiatives have been designed to address the idea that children from disadvantaged backgrounds do not have the same opportunities outside the school curriculum and that this contributes to poorer outcomes:

*Youth Matters*: Youth Matters is a Green Paper published in 2005 that presents the government's proposals for a 'radical reshaping' of services for young people aged 13-19, including a chapter titled, 'Empowering Young People: Things to do and Places to go' (Youth Matters, 2005, pp. 25-39), that directly addresses issues of choice, voice and opportunities to access good extra-curricular activities (ECA) or positive activities. Initiatives like the 'opportunity cards' and an 'opportunity fund' are proposed to give young people the buying power to influence what activities are available in their area. The paper promises legislation and statutory guidance to make Local Authorities' (L.A.s) duties in this area clear.

Emerging from Youth Matters, *Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP)* was a three year long project targeted at young people at risk from social exclusion and community crime, providing holiday and after school activities. The funding ended in 2006 and service level agreements were made. Overall, this programme was considered to be a success, leading to a range of positive outcomes for the young people involved.

*Aiming High for Young People: a ten year strategy for positive activities (2007)*

This document describes the government's 'vision for young people', which aims to 'transform the leisure-time opportunities for young people in England' (DCSF, 2007: p. 3). The paper directly links the governmental strategy to the five outcomes described in *Every Child Matters*, and describes its principles as: empowerment, access and quality. It states that involvement in positive activities should enhance the experiences of all young people, while recognising that there is a need to focus



resources upon providing support and opportunities for those for whom the vision they describe will be more difficult to achieve. In particular, the document refers to those children and young people from disadvantaged socio-economical backgrounds.

Aiming High for Young People describes how local areas are and should be developing local integrated youth services. One of the aims of this process is the provision of a range of positive leisure activities for young people by 2008, with Local Authorities having a duty to ensure that young people have access to those activities. Some of the barriers to access that Local Authorities will need to address will be discussed in terms of practical and cultural factors through the literature presented here.

If the Government is promoting ECA as a way of increasing social mobility, then it is important to examine the evidence upon which this policy is based. This review will ask:

What is the evidence to show that Extra Curricula Activities (ECA) improve outcomes in young people's lives?

How do we understand the effect of poverty upon access to ECA?

Does the evidence base reflect the principles of empowerment, access and quality as described in the Aiming High for Young People Paper?

### **The link between ECA and better outcomes**

Government policy seems to accept that positive extra-curricular activity and better

outcomes for young people are linked, where positive activities are seen as organised and structured (DCSF, 2007). Aiming High for Young People makes the claim that, 'Participation in constructive leisure-time activities... can have a significant impact upon young people's resilience and outcomes in later life.' (DCSF, 2007, p. 6), referencing Feinstein and Robson's 2005 study. There is a certain element of common sense in this. Aiming High for Young People makes the, in my opinion, acceptable assumption that having safe places to go and positive activities to engage in will reduce the risk of young people becoming involved in anti-social activities. However, the literature offers a more complicated picture of associations between ECA and outcomes for young people that are not always intuitive and can be contradictory (Fleming et al, 2007). Interestingly, even Feinstein et al's study, referenced by the Aiming Higher paper, presents a much more complex and inconclusive picture of the differing effects of leisure time activities within a complex system of influences (Feinstein and Robson, 2005).

The complex nature of the real world settings of the subject area means that any conclusions drawn are unavoidably susceptible to misinterpretation or misattribution of effects and to oversimplification. It is not possible to derive causal relationships from the data contained in the body of research that documents the benefits of positive activities across a range of outcome measures (such as attainment, behaviour, personal and social skills, school engagement and aspirations) (Barber, 2001; Mahoney et al, 2003; Mahoney et al, 2005). Nonetheless, a number of researchers have attempted to investigate the subject using a variety of methodologies and theoretical approaches (see Eccles & Templeton, 2002 for a review) and there appears to be some general, tentative agreement that structured,

organised activities lead to some better outcomes than unorganised, unstructured activities, such as youth clubs (see Feinstein et al 2005; Stattin et al, 2005; Eccles et al, 2003).

I will consider research investigating the link between ECA and better outcomes that is referenced by the Aiming High for Young People Paper. A more recent study by Fleming et al (2007) will also be described and discussed.

### **Positivist approaches to researching ECA and better outcomes**

All of these studies use longitudinal data from a secondary source and perform statistical analyses to test their hypotheses.

#### *Extracurricular Activities (ECA) and Adolescent Development (Eccles et al, 2003)*

##### *Summary*

In 2003, Eccles et al conducted a large scale (1259 respondents), longitudinal study examining the association of ECA with better educational and risky behaviour outcomes for young people, using data from the Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions (MSALT) (Eccles, 1996). The study involved the completion of an extensive questionnaire that explored a range of concepts, including:

- Activity Involvement
- Risk Behaviours. This category was essentially about drug and alcohol use.
- Educational Outcomes
- Job Characteristics
- Family Characteristics (the study uses mother's education as a measure of socio-economic status)

They found that:

- Most ECA were linked to better educational outcomes for young people after controlling for social class, gender and aptitude
- Community service and religious activities were linked to a decreased risk of drug and alcohol use
- Being a member of a sports team was associated with better educational outcomes and an increase in alcohol consumption.

Finally, Eccles et al discuss possible underlying mechanisms underpinning their findings, including identity formation, peer group membership and attachment to non-familial adults.

*Leisure Contexts in Adolescence and their Effects on Adult Outcomes: a more complete picture* (Feinstein et al, 2005)

This report is a British longitudinal study based upon data from the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70). The work was commissioned to contribute to the development of an evidence base for government policy. Feinstein et al note that this placed temporal restrictions that may have affected the rigour of their analysis.

They found that:

- Young people attending youth clubs tend to have personal and family characteristics associated with adult social exclusion, unlike young people attending uniformed or church based activities. There were no links between

young people attending sports and community centres and personal or family characteristics

- Attendance at youth clubs was negatively associated with adult outcomes, while the reverse was true for other types of activities.

*After-school Activities, Misbehaviour in School, and Delinquency from the End of Elementary School through the Beginning of High School* (Fleming et al, 2008)

Fleming et al used annual survey data from teachers and pupils across a three year period to analyse the effects of ECA, misbehaviour in school and delinquency. The research uses The Social Development Model as a framework for developing its hypotheses, predicting that previous levels of anti-social behaviour will effect levels of structured activity involvement in a later developmental stage.

They found that:

- Overall, structured activities were not shown to have strong protective influences with regards to misbehaviour or delinquency. When prior behaviour patterns and activity were adjusted for, some support for the hypothesis was gained.
- Unstructured activity involvement was positively correlated to delinquent behaviour in the first year of high school.
- Antisocial behaviour did not predict involvement in activities across the transition period from elementary to high school.

### **Some of the methodological issues**

While the large data sets increase the robustness of the statistical analyses

performed, any analysis remains reliant upon how the variables being measured are operationalised. In the case of Eccles et al (2003), the researchers donated a number of terms to describe ECA (not an absolute term itself) which they then sub-categorised according to their assumptions about how different activities should be grouped. These tended to be thematically based, i.e. sports all grouped together, church and community service activities grouped together, and may have failed to identified other underlying characteristics that may have contributed to the strength of the links between data sets.

What constitutes 'better outcomes for young people' is open to interpretation. There is a range of measures used to operationalise the concept of a good outcome. In Eccles et al (2003), outcome measures include drug and alcohol use, job characteristics and educational level. All of these measures are collected through self-report, with obvious potential biases that would involve, such as the social desirability effects that certain young people may be more susceptible to, perhaps magnifying selection effects. Fleming et al (2008) used both self and teacher reports to make their outcome measures of anti-social behaviour more robust, also controlling for previous levels of anti-social behaviour. A benefit of this measure is that the effects are measurable much more immediately than educational outcomes and job characteristics. In the time gap after engaging in an activity at 16 an infinite number of influences could have affected the job prospects of a 25 year old. Interestingly, Fleming et al's study (2008) did not provide evidence for an association between structured activity and better outcomes (less misbehaviour at school and delinquent behaviour) unless the results were adjusted for previous patterns of behaviour and levels of activity.

On a basic level, positivist statistical analysis is compromised by the interpretative nature of language. The studies' attempts to isolate variables seem to sacrifice the complexity of social issues and concepts, and do not appear to recognise the highly constructed nature of the terms used to describe people's lives and circumstances. Even the concept of an ECA may differ across contexts. From an international perspective, the results of Eccle's and Fleming's American studies must be interpreted very cautiously, as there are differences in the school systems and the cultures within which they exist that may or may not be obvious in the terminology used.

Fleming et al (2008) suggest that the link between structured activity involvement and antisocial or delinquent behaviour is bi-directional. Young people at risk of poorer outcomes are less likely to be attracted to and invited to participate in structured activities, particularly those that take place in a school setting. These selection effects further compromise the validity of any associations.

Eccles et al (2003) attempt to control for factors such as economic background in order to obtain purer relationships between the variables. In this case, they chose to use mothers' education level as an indicator of economic background, although it is not clear why this is considered to be a good measure. By controlling these factors, the researchers hope to begin to address problems of selection factors (certain young people are more likely to participate in certain activities depending upon certain characteristics they possess). However, the researcher may not have identified the correct characteristics to control for. In this study, social class, gender

and intellectual aptitude were considered to be controlled for, although Eccles et al recognise that researchers can only claim to gain 'some confidence' (p. 867) from these controls and state that causal inferences are only weakly supported in such studies.

Clearly, a number of factors have influenced the methodology used and the interpretation of results in these and the following studies, including:

- The context and culture of the researcher and the researched
- The epistemological assumptions made
- The methodological decisions made within those assumptions (such as operationalisation of variables and outcome measures)
- The theoretical underpinnings of the design and interpretation of the studies

### **A more reflexive approach**

Feinstein et al (2005) are very clear about the limitations of studies such as Eccles et al (2003), in terms of their reliance upon secondary data and the effects of selection and causal effects. They repeatedly state that conclusions must be treated with caution because of these inherent methodological problems. Both the developmental process described by Fleming et al (2008) and the issues of causality are acknowledged in Feinstein et al's tentative claims for their own methodology:

'The most that analysts can hope to achieve is the control of as many factors as possible to maximise comparability with a view to identifying the "added impact" on an educational or occupational career that is already fully underway.'

(Feinstein et al, 2005, p. 2)



In order to 'maximise' the level of control over confounding effects, Feinstein et al (2005) present a different perspective upon this kind of longitudinal, statistical analysis study, by applying Brofenbrenner's ecological model (Brofenbrenner, 1979) to their analytical approach. This approach has been adopted to differing extents by a number of authors (see Seamen et al, 2005; Margo and Dixon, 2006).

Brofenbrenner's model (1979) offers a framework for describing a large range of variables. This includes the influence of proximal factors, which are expressed through relations with family, school and peer group, and distal influences, such as gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity and locality. Feinstein et al (2005, p.3) argue that ECA settings can be conceptualised as, 'a context for the whole set of peer group influences to which a young person is subjected', which are difficult to measure from the data set. They comment that this set of proximal factors is to some extent determined by the distal factors of social class, gender and ethnicity.

There is a danger that the Feinstein et al underestimate the influence of proximal factors outside of the peer group upon choice of ECA and openness to be positively or negatively influenced by engagement in activities. Feinstein et al's own findings also seem to undermine the assumption that factors such as social class, gender and ethnicity will bear influence, when participation in sport activities (one of the few categories to have a significant link with better outcomes) was not effected by any distal factors.

The authors also decided to look at the previous experiences and circumstances that would act as predictors of a young person's level of participation in the different

contexts. This reflects an important shift of emphasis from Eccles et al (2003), as the predictive factors are extrapolated from the data set, rather than based upon the authors' assumptions. However, this is not a truly exploratory approach as the data set is restricted by the questions asked by the primary data collectors from 1970 onwards. So perhaps it is not very surprising that, nonetheless, their findings supported the assumptions made by Eccles et al (2003) to the extent that unstructured activities (such as youth clubs) tended to be attended by young people from families with poor socio-economic background. Feinstein et al (2005) were able to add that these also tended to be young people with personal characteristics associated with increased levels of social exclusion in adulthood. Uniformed activities such as Guides and church activities had a negative association with the above factors, and importantly, sports activities were attended by a fairly representative cross-section of society.

I think that Feinstein et al (2005) make an important point about the dangers of using low socio-economic status as a single sub category that does not recognise the diversity of this population. Of course the sheer size of the data used in Freedom's Orphans (Margo and Dixon, 2006) allowed a more detailed analysis than was possible in Eccles et al's (2003) study.

Eccles et al's (2003) research is heavily positioned in a positivist epistemology. In its endeavour to reduce human behaviour into meaningful, measurable units, a number of questionable assumptions have been made. One of the first of these was the role of social economic background upon engagement in ECA and how this could be measured. The differing views of poverty and how it can be measured will inevitably

effect the way that the topic is researched.

In the next part of the review I will look at how some authors have attempted to address the difficulties around the concept of poverty within the research area.

### **The meaning of poverty in ECA research**

Aiming High for Young People (2007) recognises the important role of poverty upon participation in positive activities: that poverty may be a barrier to access. In the previously discussed study by Eccles et al (2003), the researchers chose to use a young person's mother's educational level as an indicator of social class and therefore poverty. This seems to be a crude and inaccurate measure when the term poverty is deconstructed. A number of alternative conceptualisations are presented here.

#### **Relational Poverty**

Blanden and Gibbons (2006) favour a relational definition of poverty: 'where families are defined as poor if their income – 'equivalised' by adjusting for household composition – falls below 60% of the median income in the population, before housing costs.' (Blandon and Gibbons, 2006, p. 15). Where Eccles et al (2003) seem to be making an assumption about the link between maternal educational level and income, the relative definition described here offers a more objective measure based on income alone.

#### **Poverty as more than level of income**

I believe that the compromise of meaningful understanding of the term poverty for

analytical practicality presented above is too great and invalidating to provide a purposeful view of people's experiences. Lister (2004) warns that technical measures of poverty through income levels (as used by the Government) do not necessarily relate to the meaning of the term. Seaman et al (2005) question whether it is poverty per se that affects outcomes for young people, or the consequences of living in a disadvantaged community. If so, rather than asking how poverty affects outcomes, some authors suggest that research should ask what the most harmful effects of living in disadvantaged communities are and how they constrain those affected (Seaman et al, 2005; Blanden & Gibbons, 2006). Feinstein et al (2005) do not conceptualise poverty as a single idea, but as a complex idea that may or may not make the person vulnerable to certain influences.

### **The Capabilities Approach and the socialisation gap**

Freedom's Orphans is a British report produced by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), looking at 'the state of youth' (Margo and Dixon, 2006, p. vii) as debated by academics, policy makers and the media. Like the reports already discussed, it uses an analysis of longitudinal data to endorse participation in extra-curricular activities. The report identifies social class as a crucial factor in determining outcomes for young people and recommends that barriers to participation for disadvantaged youth need to be identified, asking the questions: what is poverty and how does it stop young people from accessing positive activities?

In Freedom's Orphans (Margo and Dixon, 2006), the authors apply a 'Capabilities Approach' to the problem in order to understand the mechanisms at work under the concept of poverty. This is not too far removed from the approach based on

Brofenbrenner's model adopted in Feinstein's analysis (2005), in that it is interested in how contextual factors (similar to the distal and proximal factors described above) influence personal agency. They call this 'bounded agency' (p. 57) which is the outcome of the interdependency of 'agency, and economic, environmental, social, cultural and psychological constraints.' (p.57): any person is only capable of analysing their own situation according to the skills, experiences and understandings of the world that they already possess. Therefore, those growing up in poverty are likely to be constrained by a much more complex, and so more difficult to address, set of factors than a lack of money alone. When policy talks about removing barriers to access for young people (for example, in 'Aiming High for Young People' DCSF, 2007), this is the model upon which that task is based.

From a capabilities perspective, young people's experiences and agency needs to be understood in a socio-historical context, accounting for the job market, educational trends and other aspects of the socio-political climate. This may highlight a problem with using longitudinal data spanning a twenty to thirty year period. The last fifty years has been a period of fast changes in both education and employment, so it is likely that the challenges faced by young people today are somewhat different to those faced by the 1970 British Cohort, for example.

One area which has changed dramatically has been a move towards more personalised learning. According to Margo and Dixon (2006), this type of education requires a level of social, or 'soft' skills to support success. According to this idea, the term 'Poverty Gap' is actually describing a more insidious and complex concept that Goldthorpe et al (2004) describe as a 'socialisation gap'. Because of the changing

values of the education system and hence the job market, children who might be described as 'middle class' are protected by their verbal and interpersonal skills. The development of soft skills is in part impeded by poverty because parents can not afford to buy positive activities that will enhance children's social skills, (Margo and Dixon, 2006) i.e. constructive, organised activities described in the research. In this way, the education system could be seen to be a reflection of middle class ideals with extra curricular activities serving to reinforce this. If so, research showing better educational outcomes linked to positive activities may be masking the more direct association of soft skills to higher achievement and increased participation. The causality of these relationships is likely to be far from simple.

One problem with the use of Capabilities Approach to help describe a more complete view of a person's experience of poverty is that it is very difficult to measure. How could any of the studies discussed so far have conducted such an analysis of the data sets within such a complex model?

All of the studies described above take a largely positivist approach, using donated terms to describe people's lives. Perhaps a complete change of emphasis is needed in order to produce truly meaningful data about individuals' experiences and understandings of their own situations.

### **A different approach**

In order to describe the impact of poverty and social exclusion upon the everyday lives of children and young people, Tess Ridge (2002) used a child-centred approach that endeavoured to give children a voice in the policy debate (Sutton et al, 2007).

Part of her findings embellish an important issue sometimes missed by the more positivist research discussed here. Children reported being restricted from fully participating in school life because of a lack of family resources for purchasing uniforms, classroom materials and other costly items. Being unable to afford school trips and transport/fees to leisure activities, meant that friendships were more difficult to maintain. By listening directly to the young people involved, Tess Ridge managed to deliver a perspective on previous findings that adds meaning and avoids making assumptions about people's lives. The next section will look at some more participatory research studies and how this approach may be able to throw light upon the policy evidence base.

### **The Joseph Rowntree Foundation Studies**

In 2007, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation published 'Experiences of poverty and educational disadvantage', a collection of eight projects looking at the experiences and attitudes towards the education of children and young people from different backgrounds. Some of the research used a participatory approach to look at how children and young people define and experience their own socio-economic status (Sutton et al., 2007) and to investigate the leisure time of young people from different backgrounds (Wikeley et al, 2007). Both studies used epistemologies that could be said to concur more closely with the government's stated principle of empowerment.

#### **Listening to children's views about poverty – a participatory approach**

In 'A Child's-Eye View of Social Difference', Sutton et al (2007) adopt a participatory approach in order to, 'put into practice the belief that people in poverty have a right to participate in analysing their own situation and how to tackle it' (Bennett and Roberts,

2004, p.6). Their methodology is comparative (between two groups of children from different economic social backgrounds) and reflexive (in that as the research was participatory, the young people directed the focus of research sessions, and ideas and themes from each group's discussions were shared in the subsequent session to enable a coherent shared agenda across the groups.)

### The poverty concept

The findings regarding how the children defined themselves in relation to their socio-economic status are pertinent to the question of how poverty is conceptualised in research. Throughout the research, Sutton et al (2007) report that the self-labelled 'estate children' never defined themselves as 'poor', despite many of them experiencing living below the government defined relative income poverty threshold. Similarly, the group of children attending a private fee-paying school did not refer to themselves as 'rich'. Both the estate and the private school children placed themselves towards the centre of a 'rich/poor' continuum, providing some evidence of the relativity and perhaps the undesirability of the terms. Sutton et al (2007) describe this as the "otherness' of poverty and affluence' (p. 11).

This poses a problem for the researcher as it raises ethical considerations about how participants are assigned to groups. Clearly, it would be undesirable to label young people in a way that may affect how they see themselves and how they are seen by others (Ridge, 2002). In Sutton et al's research (2007), household circumstance information was collected using a pro forma that 'most' (p. 7) parents completed. Only 11 out of the 19 participants' parents gave information about their economic situation. This has clear implications for the validity of the research, as the economic data



sample is so small and may not be representative of the research sample or any wider population outside of the study.

Self selection effects mean that those in less difficult circumstances may have been more likely to volunteer to participate in the study. Any selection effects are likely to be increased by the focus group methodology used, as it is one that requires and is likely to appeal to participants with a certain level of the soft skills referred to earlier. The data collection methods used by Sutton et al (discussion, role play, interviews) reflect the type of education techniques identified as potentially alienating for young people with limited social and interpersonal skills – the very young people that extended services are intended to engage. In addition, even if a range of participants were recruited into the focus groups, this methodology has been criticised for being democratic at the expense of individual voices. Focus groups can be subject to group effects that may result in some voices being heard louder than others (Bloor et al, 2001). Again, it seems likely that those voices would belong to participants with more developed communication skills.

In the same way that the reductionist measures of poverty made in the more positivist epistemologies compromise the real world meaningfulness of the research, does the lack of a cohesive, objective measure in this case compromise the applicability of this research to public policy? Sutton et al (2007) claim not. They claim to provide 'insight' (p. 3), whilst not imposing negative or stigmatising terms onto those who reject them. Furthermore, it could be argued that their method of categorisation may better reflect the idea of poverty being a cultural rather than just an income-based experience, as described by Goldthorpe (2004), making 'estate

children' a more practical and useful term for researchers and policy writers.

### Barriers to access

The participatory nature of the research meant that the young people themselves identified which aspects of their lives they consider to be important. Both groups felt that how they spent their free time was highly important, with activities being separated into structured and unstructured types, as with other research in the area. Again, as predicted by the more positivist studies in this review, 'estate' children attended fewer organised activities than those from the private sector. In agreement with the findings of Ridge (2002), the 'estate' children described a major barrier to participation as cost. Another barrier was formed by the fact that many of the activities available to estate children happened on the school premises, which Sutton et al (2007) found carried a risk of children who stayed behind at school being labelled 'a swot'. Lack of transport was also mentioned as a barrier, as it was in Ridge's study (2002).

In comparison to the longitudinal studies in the earlier section of this review, Sutton et al's 2007 study lacks detail about the types of activities that it is discussing. However, it does provide some rich data about the children and young people's perceptions of the activities. For example, three participants spoke about partaking in the local cadet movement as 'keeping them out of trouble' and getting them 'off the estate' (p. 27). As only three participants had experience of cadets, it would be unwise to make broad generalisations from the data, but clearly this insight into the participants' own values and priorities is a valuable contribution to our understanding. At the very least this research shows a need for more careful consideration about the assumptions we

make about people and the terminology we use to describe their circumstances.

### **Exploring the benefits of ECA – an agenda driven qualitative approach**

Wikeley et al's 2007 study is not as pure in its participatory approach as Sutton et al, in that it sets out a clear agenda for the research that is directed by the researchers and not the participants. The study uses qualitative research methods (mapping and interviewing) to gain a more detailed perspective from the participants than quantitative methods might be able to provide. Where the more statistical approaches favoured in much of the research discussed has been reductionist, and relied upon theoretical interpretations of the results, this kind of exploratory, qualitative design allows a broader understanding of the benefits of after school activities (Brynnner and Feinstein, 2005), and uses the participants' own interpretations rather than ones extracted from academic theory.

The research asks three questions:

- 'What do young people gain from engagement in out-of-school activities?
- Do young people from low-income families participate less in these activities than those from more affluent homes?
- If so what can be done to redress the added disadvantage that this creates for young people in low-income families?'

(p.vii)

The authors state that their research focus is based upon an assumption that positive relations with adults in school will promote more positive attitudes towards school and learning that will lead to better general outcomes for young people. Like Aiming High

for Young People (2007), Wikeley et al (2007) recognise the importance of soft or social skills in achieving this, and their research is an exploration of how educational relationships outside of school may provide opportunities for soft skill development.

The research could be described as taking a critical approach, as it is explicit about its intentions regarding the inequalities of the current system:

‘If young people in low-income families are denied, or limited in, these experiences then they will be further disadvantaged in their engagement with teachers and the learning that takes place in school.’

(Wikeley et al, 2007, p.1)

The use of the word ‘denied’ implies an authoritative power that is somehow creating or sustaining the current existence of a ‘socialisation gap’ (as coined by Goldthorpe and Mills (2003)), and that this contributes to an already inequitable system.

The poverty concept

Like Sutton et al (2007), the current study sought to compare groups of children. The authors used a dichotomy of ‘Free School Meals (FSM)’ and ‘More Affluent’ to describe the economic status of the participants, but included additional factors grouping the young people, such as whether the children live in rural or suburban areas and their age. The sample was intended to be split evenly between all these factors, but small sample sizes meant that some compromises had to be made.

Unlike Sutton et al (2007), children from the same or similar schools were allocated to the disadvantaged or affluent group according to whether they were receiving FSM. The participating schools all had a high number of pupils on role who received FSM, meaning that all the participants in both groups were likely to be experiencing some level of relative economic disadvantage when compared to children and young people from schools with a more usual level of FSMs (Wikeley et al, 2007). In this way, Wikeley et al have, to some extent, controlled for the effects of the cultural context of very different types of schools that would have been apparent in Sutton et al's research. The focus is more distinctly upon the effects of relative family income in the two types of settings and age bands. This may be a more subtle and useful difference.

#### The ECA

In asking what young people gain from engagement in out-of-school activities, the researchers aim to embellish the widely accepted premise that out of school activities are beneficial to young people by exploring the young people's own perceptions.

Importantly, they found that young people valued and benefited from:

- Having responsibilities
- A greater sense of identity – this was demonstrated through a shared vocabulary, skills and purpose
- A sense of making a contribution to the adult world
- Greater self-control and confidence – the young people tended to accept the discipline expectations in ECA, which was linked to the perception that adult

participation was also seen as voluntary and part of a more equal power relationship.

- An awareness of learning within a clear structure for progression in some cases, that increases motivation
- The development of positive relationships with adult and others that contributes to the development of soft skills.

### Barriers to access

As well as exploring the barriers to access of ECA, Wikeley et al (2007) asked what it was that provided the main impetus for starting and then maintaining involvement in an activity. The main factor for starting to participate was social, while for continued commitment was enjoyment and parental support.

In line with the other research discussed, Wikeley et al (2007) found that children from less affluent backgrounds were less likely to attend organised after-school provision. They were more reliant on ECA provided by school, which could be a factor for low attendance (fear of being labelled a swot, negative association with school in general.) Other factors identified were consistent with Capability Theory and other ecosystemic models, such as Bronfenbrenner and the findings of Ridge et al (2002): transport, cost, lack of time available due to complex family structures. This would seem to lend the research good concurrent validity, further supported by the range of activities undertaken by the young people, which the authors were able to map onto those described in the Youth Matters consultation (DfES, 2006).

The intensive nature of qualitative research such as Sutton et al and Wikeley et al's

2007 studies for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, usually necessitates a small sample size, making findings less generalisable than when larger samples are used. However, the richness of the data offers an opportunity to understand people's real experiences on individual and/or localised levels, without the methodological constraints of more positivist epistemologies and ontologies. The more participatory approaches can create an evidence base for social policy that is directly relevant to the lives of those that the policies are designed to affect.

## **Conclusions**

In *Aiming Higher for Young People*, the Government professes to adhere to the principles of empowerment, access and quality (DCSF, 2007), and yet it continues to rely heavily upon research that is based on positivist principles (such as the studies by Eccles et al, 2003, Feinstein et al, 2005 and Margo and Dixon, 2006, discussed in this review) to contribute to the evidence base for policy development around poverty and achievement. From a critical point of view, this could be seen as reinforcing a positivist model that does not address the inherent inequalities of current systems through its methodologies or ontology. Whilst research designed within more traditional epistemologies may afford a cloak of respectability to Government reports, the reduction of complex issues to quantitatively measurable items weakens the usefulness of the findings in real world situations.

In addition, the researched are disempowered by the assumed position of expert taken by the researcher, who dictates the focus for and interpretation of the study. Even the language used to describe people's circumstances seems to be in danger of alienating people from the research by using terms that may be stigmatising or

meaningless.

Nonetheless, the statistical analytical studies described here do provide support for the proposal that extra curricular activities are beneficial to young people and offer interesting theoretical models for understanding the relationship between concepts of poverty and achievement. This provides a good foundation for more in depth, qualitative studies of young people's experiences of disadvantage and positive activities.

In response to Aiming High for Young People's proposition that all Local Authorities (LAs) will be responsible for removing barriers to access for all young people, more research looking at what those barriers are and how they might be overcome on a local level is needed. Wikeley et al (2007) attempted to compare the experiences of rural and suburban children, as well as those from relatively affluent or poor backgrounds, highlighting the need to conduct research in different cultural contexts, recognising the diversity within the population categorised as living in relative poverty.

Future research may explore further the social categories used by children and young people to describe their own circumstances and any links to participation in and experience of positive activities. Within communities many different groups exist that are not wholly defined by relative wealth, but by other cultural factors. A more detailed description of the relevant factors to promoting or barring participation within specific cultural contexts, may provide practical and relevant recommendations for L.A.s to fulfil their duty to provide access to positive activities for all, according to the principles of empowerment, access and quality (DCSF, 2007).





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**Part II**

**AN EXPLORATION OF HOW AND WHY A GROUP OF YOUNG  
PEOPLE IN AN URBAN AREA OF A NORTHERN CITY DECIDE TO  
ENGAGE OR NOT ENGAGE IN POSITIVE ACTIVITIES**

## **ABSTRACT**

Recent policy and literature have advocated the importance of access to positive activities for young people as part of the strategy to lessen social disadvantage.

This research aimed to explore how 'typical' young people in an urban locality make the decision to engage in activities and whether relative social disadvantage has the same affect in this area as that suggested in the literature.

A case study approach was used, involving individual interviews with 6 year 7 pupils and 3 service providers linked to a sports college. A further focus group interview helped clarify interpretation. Thematic analysis was used to identify themes and patterns in the data. Generalisations about the pattern of engagement in positive activities for disadvantaged young people were found not to apply to this case study, challenging the media tendency towards negative stereotyping of young people in the area. The need for local solutions to local issues was emphasised as a key issue.



# **AN EXPLORATION OF HOW AND WHY A GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN AN URBAN AREA OF A NORTHERN CITY DECIDE TO ENGAGE OR NOT ENGAGE IN POSITIVE ACTIVITIES**

## **Introduction**

Currently, work is being undertaken in the authority in which I work to improve the delivery of youth services, particularly focusing upon the provision of positive activities for young people outside school hours. Many resources are directed towards those young people who are considered to have the greatest support needs or to be most vulnerable. Through discussions with professionals and young people during my work as a trainee educational psychologist, a potentially 'invisible' cohort of young people has been identified. These young people are the ones who are not considered to be atypical, who do not attract our attention through exceptional talent or challenging difficulties. These young people demand the least resources and as such, are in danger of 'slipping through the net' when economic restraints mean that supposedly universal interventions are targeted towards those with a higher level of perceived need. Local, contextual issues are likely to affect a young person's capability to participate in positive activities and so the current research is strongly rooted in its specific geographical location.

This research is interested in the perceptions and experiences of these young people.

### **The research base for a link between Extra Curricular Activities (ECA) and better outcomes**

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the gap between the level of education achievement for young people from disadvantaged and advantaged backgrounds in the UK is one of the largest in OECD Countries (OECD, 2002). Young people who receive free school meals (FSMs) are less than half as likely to achieve five good GCSEs (DfES, 2006). Simultaneously, the gap between the richest and the poorest in terms of disposable income has increased (Paxton and Dixon, 2004) and those who were born into disadvantage at the beginning of this century are less likely to move out of it than in previous generations (Margo and Dixon, 2006; Blanden and Gibbons, 2006).

Seaman et al (2005) question whether it is poverty per se that affects outcomes for young people, or the consequences of living in a disadvantaged community. The Capabilities Approach adopted in Freedom's Orphans (Margo and Dixon, 2006) describes how a range of contextual factors (including economic, environmental, social, cultural and psychological constraints) influence personal agency. Those growing up in poverty are likely to be constrained by a much more complex and difficult to address set of factors than a lack of money alone.

In its efforts to meet its pledge to close the poverty gap, the government has identified non-engagement in extra-curricular activities (ECA) as a potential mediating factor in the association between disadvantage and poorer outcomes (DCSF, 2007). Consequently, proposals for a 'radical reshaping' of services for young people aged 13-19 were presented in the Youth Matters Green Paper (2005) . The

paper directly addresses issues surrounding young people's opportunities to access good ECA.

Emerging from Youth Matters, *Aiming High for Young People: a ten year strategy for positive activities (2007)* describes a 'vision for young people', which aims to 'transform the leisure-time opportunities for young people in England' (DCSF, 2007: p. 3). Its stated principles are empowerment, access and equality. It believes that involvement in positive activities should enhance the experiences of all young people, with a particular need to focus resources upon providing opportunities for the disadvantaged. *Aiming Higher for Young People* describes how Local Authorities have a duty to ensure that young people have access to a range of positive leisure activities by 2008, provided through local integrated youth services.

Government policy accepts that positive ECA and better outcomes for young people are linked, where positive activities (ECA) are seen as organised and structured (DCSF, 2007). *Aiming High for Young People* makes the assumption that having safe places to go and positive activities to engage in will reduce the risk of young people becoming involved in anti-social activities. However, the literature offers a more complicated picture of associations between ECA and outcomes for young people that are not always intuitive and can be contradictory (Fleming et al, 2007). The complex nature of real world settings means that any conclusions drawn are unavoidably susceptible to misinterpretation or misattribution of effects and to oversimplification. It is not possible to derive causal relationships from the data contained in the body of research that documents the benefits of positive activities across a range of outcome measures (such as attainment, behaviour, personal and

social skills, school engagement and aspirations) (Barber et al, 2001; Mahoney et al, 2003; Mahoney et al, 2005). Nonetheless, a number of researchers have attempted to investigate the subject using a variety of methodologies and theoretical approaches (see Eccles & Templeton, 2002 for a review) and there appears to be general agreement that structured, organised activities lead to some better outcomes than unorganised, unstructured activities (see Feinstein et al 2005; Stattin et al, 2005; Eccles et al, 2003).

The main studies referenced in *Aiming High for Young People* (2007) take a positivist approach to investigating a link between ECA engagement and positive outcomes for young people . They all perform statistical analyses on longitudinal data gathered from a secondary source. This raises some methodological issues.

On a fundamental level, positivist statistical analysis is compromised by the interpretative nature of language. The studies' attempts to isolate variables reduce the complexity of social issues and concepts and do not recognise the highly constructed nature of the terms used to describe people's lives and circumstances. For example, in Eccles et al (2003), the terms used to describe ECA are donated by the researchers and then sub-categorised according to the researchers' assumptions about which underlying characteristics may have contributed to the strength of the links between data sets.

Not only is the operationalisation of the concept of a good outcome varied across the studies, but in Eccles et al (2003), data are collected through self-report, with potential biases such as social desirability effects. Fleming et al (2008) used both self

and teacher reports to make their outcome measures of anti-social behaviour more robust, also controlling for previous levels of anti-social behaviour. A benefit of this outcome measure is that it allows the effects to be observed much more immediately observable than longitudinal outcome measures such as educational attainments and job characteristics.

Fleming et al (2008) identify that selection effects compromise the validity of any associations. They suggest that the link between structured activity involvement and antisocial behaviour is bi-directional. Young people at risk of poorer outcomes are less likely to be attracted to and invited to participate in structured activities, particularly those that take place in a school setting.

Attempts to address problems of selection factors are made by controlling for a range of variables, such as socio-economic status, social class, gender and intellectual aptitude (Eccles et al, 2003). However, such decisions about which variables to control for are based upon the assumptions made by the researcher about what the most influential factors are. Eccles et al (2003) recognise that causal inferences are only weakly supported in such studies.

Other research is available that has attempted to address the subject from a non-positivist standpoint. Tess Ridge (2002) uses a child-centred approach that endeavours to give children a voice in the policy debate. Children reported being restricted from fully participating in school life because of a lack of family resources for purchasing uniforms, classroom materials and other costly items. Being unable to afford school trips and transport/fees to leisure activities meant that friendships were

more difficult to maintain. By listening directly to the young people involved, Tess Ridge manages to deliver a perspective on previous positivistic findings that adds meaning and avoids making assumptions about people's lives.

In 'A Child's-Eye View of Social Difference', Sutton et al (2007) adopts a participatory approach, designed to, 'put into practice the belief that people in poverty have a right to participate in analysing their own situation and how to tackle it' (Bennett and Roberts, 2004, p.6). (See the 'The Joseph Rowntree Foundation' section on page 26 of the critical literature review chapter for more detail).

The participants felt that how they spent their free time was highly important, with activities being separated into structured and unstructured types, replicating the findings of more traditional research in the area. The self-labelled estate children attended fewer organised activities than the group of young people schooled in the private sector. In agreement with the findings of Ridge (2002), the estate children described major barriers to participation as cost and lack of transport. Another barrier was the fact that many of the activities available to estate children happened on the school premises, meaning that attendance carried the risk of being labelled 'a swot'.

While the small sample size limits generalisability, insights into the participants' own values and priorities is a valuable contribution to our understanding and shows a need for careful consideration about the assumptions made about people and their circumstances.

Wikeley et al's (2007) study is not as pure in its participatory approach. It sets out a

clear agenda at the outset of the research that is directed by the researchers and not the participants (unlike Sutton et al (2007), where the participants directed the line of investigation). The study uses qualitative research methods (mapping and interviewing) to gain a more detailed perspective from the participants than quantitative methods might be able to provide. This kind of exploratory, qualitative design allows a broader understanding of the benefits of after school activities (Brynner and Feinstein, 2005), and uses the participants' own interpretations rather than ones extracted from academic theory.

The research asks three questions:

- 'What do young people gain from engagement in out-of-school activities?
- Do young people from low-income families participate less in these activities than those from more affluent homes?
- If so what can be done to redress the added disadvantage that this creates for young people in low-income families?'

(p.vii)

Like *Aiming High for Young People* (DCSF, 2007), the authors recognise the importance of 'soft' or social skills in achieving positive relations with adults in school, in order to promote more positive attitudes towards school and learning that will lead to better general outcomes for young people. It assumes that educational relationships outside of school may provide opportunities for soft skill development.

Wikeley et al (2007) sought to compare groups of children, using a category labels of 'Free School Meals (FSM)' and 'More Affluent'. The participating schools all had a

high number of pupils on role who received FSMs, meaning that all the participants were likely to be experiencing some level of relative economic disadvantage when compared to children and young people from schools with a more usual level of FSMs (Wikeley et al, 2007). To some extent, this may have controlled for the effects of different cultural contexts of different schools, such as in Sutton et al's (2007) research. This could have resulted in some natural reduction of extraneous variables.

They found that young people valued and benefited from:

- Having responsibilities
- A greater sense of identity
- A sense of making a contribution to the adult world
- Greater self-control and confidence – the young people tended to accept the discipline expectations in ECA, which was linked to the perception that adult participation was also seen as voluntary and part of a more equal power relationship.
- An awareness of learning within a clear structure for progression
- The development of positive relationships with adult and others that contributes to the development of soft skills.

In line with the other research discussed, Wikeley et al (2007) found that children from less affluent backgrounds were less likely to attend organised after-school provision. They were more reliant on ECA provided by school, which could be a factor for low attendance (fear of being labelled a swot, negative association with school in general). Other factors identified were consistent with findings of Ridge et al (2002), Margo and Dixon (2006) and Sutton et al (2007) including: transport, cost,



lack of time available due to complex family structures. This would seem to lend the research good concurrent validity, further supported by the range of activities undertaken by the young people, which the authors were able to map onto those described in the Youth Matters consultation (DfES, 2006).

The intensive nature of qualitative research usually necessitates a small sample size, making findings less generalisable. However, the richness of the data offers an opportunity to understand young people's real experiences on localised levels, without the methodological constraints of more positivist epistemologies and ontology. The more participatory approaches can create an evidence base for social policy that is directly relevant to the lives of those that the policies are designed to affect.

### **Links to the current study**

In *Aiming Higher for Young People*, the Government professes to adhere to the principles of empowerment, access and quality (DCSF, 2007), yet it continues to rely upon research that is based on positivist principles (such as the studies by Eccles et al, 2003, Feinstein et al, 2005 and Margo and Dixon, 2006). This could be seen as reinforcing a positivist model that does not address the inherent inequalities of current systems through its methodologies or ontology. Whilst research designed within more traditional epistemologies may afford a cloak of respectability to Government reports, the reduction of complex issues to quantitatively measurable items weakens the usefulness of the findings in real world situations. Studies such as Ridge (2002), Sutton et al (2007) and Wikeley (2007) have demonstrated the validity of taking a qualitative approach to the exploration of the experiences of young people

engaging in Positive Activities from their own perspectives. The current study adopts a similar approach to the Wikeley study (2007), accepting the conclusions of the literature that Positive Activities are beneficial for young people, and attempting to involve young people in describing their own participation choices and possible solutions to access barriers through the adoption of a more qualitative approach to researching this area. This approach should concur more closely to the principles of empowerment, access and quality (DCSF, 2007).

The literature has led to the consideration of how communities are not wholly defined by relative wealth, but by other cultural factors. A more detailed description of the relevant factors to promoting or barring participation within specific cultural contexts, may provide practical and relevant recommendations for LAs to fulfil their duty to provide access to positive activities for all. For this reason, the aim of the study is specific about focussing on the description of local experiences, assuming that experiences in other localities will be different. Therefore, the overall aim of this study is:

*'To explore how and why young people at a high school in an urban area of a north west city decide which positive activities (as defined by the document 'Aiming High for Young People', DCSF, 2007) to engage in.'*

The main research questions are:

- Which positive activities are the target group involved in?

- What makes or would make the young people want to attend a positive activity?
- How could access be improved?

## **Methodology**

### **Case Study Design**

In its aim, the study accepts the assumption made in government policy that positive, organised activities lead to better outcomes for young people (DCSF, 2007). It criticises the methodological constraints of the positivist body of research in providing a meaningful description of people's real world experiences and perceptions for the purpose of giving a context for social policy decisions. The aim of the study is not to generate data that are generalisable to a much larger population, but rather to enrich understanding of local issues in order to inform local solutions. As such, the benefits of a qualitative, case study approach exceed the benefits of the experiment method or survey. In addition, the multiple case study method, as described by Yin (2009) allows enough flexibility for emerging themes from each participant to be further explored within the interview and from case to case.

An interpretive approach also adheres more closely to the stated principle of empowerment in the Aiming High for Young People paper (DCSF, 2007) to which this research refers (as discussed in the introduction).

The case study design has similarities with the design described by Wikeley et al (2007), in order that some theoretical comparisons may be made in analysis through a comparison of the two studies' results. However, the current study is more firmly placed within the methodologies associated with case study design, as described by Yin (2009) and Robson (2002), in order to increase the methodological robustness and rigour of the study and to provide a structure for making comparisons between a number of sources of evidence.

## Underlying Theory

Yin (2009) states that a piece of case study research should be driven by a general theory about the subject. In this case, the body of research discussed in the literature review led to the development of a theory that:

*local solutions are needed that respond the supportive factors and barriers to participation in positive activities on a local level, as well as the more general issues relating to socio-economic factors that tend to be reported in the literature discussed in the literature review.*

## Propositions

The following theoretical propositions were developed to guide data collection, in terms of participant selection (see p. 60); and the orientation of the interviews towards exploring barriers and supportive factors (or practical considerations). The propositions relate to the underlying theory and aims of the study as drawn from the literature review.

- There are practical considerations that inform decisions to participate or not in positive activities
- Many of these practical considerations may be linked to the socio-economic status of the individual
- Considerations will be linked to aspects of the locality in which young people live and go to school

- The propositions point towards the theoretical position that many of these factors should be less pertinent to young people considered to be from more affluent backgrounds
- In addition, where young people attend activities some/all of these practicalities will have been addressed

### Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis is the young person's decision to participate or not in positive activities. As this is the only unit of analysis, this is an holistic multiple case study design, as described by Yin (2009) and Robson (2002).

### Case selection

The six cases were selected to meet the requirements of a replication study design, including three *literal replications* and three *theoretical replications* (Yin, 2009). The literal replications would be expected to produce similar findings and were chosen to closely resemble each other. The theoretical replication case studies would be expected to provide different results for predictable reasons (in this case, because of differences in socio-economic background).

Participants were selected by the Head of Year 7 (considered best placed to make informed judgements about the suitability of each individual) according to the following criteria:

- In Year 7
- Attending the designated High School

- Not accessing specifically targeted services (e.g. Looked After Children services, Youth Offending Team services)
- Not regarded as challenging or gifted by staff at the school

The selection of participants was partly guided by the propositions. To provide the necessary condition to support the theoretical propositions about socio-economic factors, three pupils who were considered to be from socio-economically deprived backgrounds and three who were considered to be from more affluent backgrounds were selected. In concordance with Wikeley et al's study (2007), qualification for the receipt of Free School Meals helped to guide which cases were considered theoretical replications (relatively less affluent). Four female and two male participants were interviewed. Two girls and one boy were in each theoretical replication group.

An additional data source was the local youth services team. A representative had been collecting data about attendance at positive activities and what services are available. This documentary and survey data was included in the analysis across the case studies and the study as a whole, forming part of the process of data triangulation (Robson, 2002).

The member of staff with responsibility for ECA was also interviewed.

#### Data Collection

Three sources of evidence were used for triangulation purposes.

- Each of the six participants (representing six cases) was asked to provide information about the activities they engage in over a typical week. While this method relied upon the participant's accurate recall of the week's activities, it also allowed for unusual events that may have affected attendance at an ECA to be discounted, enabling the generation of a map of a typical weeks activities. The use of a 'week map' (see Appendix ii, p. 103) was intended to structure responses and aid recall. It was also thought that some cross-case pattern matching would be possible in analysis.
- Each participant was given an individual interview guided by the research questions. As an exploratory piece of work, an open interview format was used. As each pupil was regarded as a single case, this allowed more flexibility to follow emerging and/or unexpected themes within an interview and for the follow up of those themes in subsequent cases. It should have reduced the number of assumptions made about likely responses and themes.
- Interview evidence was collected from the local youth services for the area and the Head of Sports Specialism at the school with responsibility for the Year 7 extended school sports service. This was used to triangulate across the cases during analysis and to ascertain any further perspective that they might be able to offer in relation to the research questions.

A case study plan or protocol was developed to ensure some consistency across the way that the different case studies were approached (based upon Yin, 2009). This is included in the appendix.



### **Threats to validity and reliability and steps taken**

While the current study is exploratory rather than explanatory (that is, it does not seek to define a causal relationship) there are still aspects of validity and reliability that warrant examination. One particular threat to construct validity is the use of FSMs as a guide for theoretical replication studies. There is debate surrounding the categorisation of the concept of social disadvantage (see the literature review for a discussion) and FSM is a crude measure. One of the main reasons for choosing this measure was in order to reflect Wikeley et al's study (2007), allowing some theoretical comparisons to be made. In addition, the measure can be used without further labelling or stigmatising of the young people by intrusive questioning of their socio-economic status (Sutton et al, 2007).

Further steps taken to address threats to the validity of the study are described in the table below (based on Yin, 2009).

***Table 1. Threats to validity and steps taken***

<b>Type of validity</b>	<b>Steps taken to avoid threats</b>
Construct Validity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive activities or ECA are defined according to the definition used in government policy (DCSF, 2007)</li> <li>• Use of data and theory triangulation (multiple sources of evidence and different theories contributing to the formulation of the research questions and propositions).</li> <li>• Use a case study protocol to increase consistency across</li> </ul>

	<p>cases</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of open ended interviews to avoid pre-empting responses and the relevance of concepts</li> <li>• Researcher talked through notes made at the end of interviews with participants to ensure that evidence was accurate (controlling researcher bias).</li> <li>• Finally, key informants or participants were invited to comment upon the data <b>analysis in a focus group</b>. This was in order to increase the construct validity of the research by minimising the assumptions made in interpreting the data.</li> </ul>
<p>Internal Validity – establishing a causal relationship</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No single causal relationship is sought.</li> </ul>
<p>External Validity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The focus of the study is upon describing a particular local case with reference to local issues, therefore generalisation of results would not be appropriate. However, there may be some generalisation of the principle of the need for localised analysis.</li> <li>• Any generalisation will be analytic rather than statistical.</li> </ul>

To increase the reliability of the study, Yin (2009) recommends the use of a case

study protocol. See appendix 1, p. 97.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The following steps were taken to ensure that the study adhered to 'Ethical Principles for Conducting Research with Human Participants' (British Psychological Society) and guidance from the British Ethical Research Association.

Written consent was gained from the host school, parents and the participants. After written consent was given in response to an explanatory letter, volunteers and their parents were invited to a meeting at which further explanation was given about the reason for the research, what it entailed, the right to withdraw information at any point, what would happen to the data once the process was complete.

All data were presented anonymously, with personal data removed. However, the small sample size and qualitative nature of the study meant that some data could be recognisable to some people. Participants were asked if there are any data that they would like to withdraw at the end of the interview, (although it was not anticipated that there would be particularly sensitive data.) They were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Data were given a code for storage without real names attached. They were stored with a password lock.

The selection of participants by a member of school staff may have compromised the voluntary nature of participation. The power relationship between staff and pupil may

have led to some implied coercion. Participants were asked for consent verbally and reminded of the voluntary nature of their participation at all junctures.

### **Approaches taken to data analysis**

The general analytic strategy used for this study was 'reliance on theoretical propositions' (Yin, 2009). The underlying theory, theoretical propositions and research questions have all guided analysis. This process has been flexible with ongoing analysis during data collection allowing for new avenues of exploration to be opened up within case studies and followed up in subsequent case study interviews. Alternative interpretations have been explored throughout analysis.

#### Cross case and thematic analysis

Case orientated analysis, in which a comparison of quantitative data relating to themes across cases was made (Miles & Huberman, 1994, Yin, 2009) was used. This is the method Miles and Huberman suggest when the aim of the study is to show the circumstances under which something is likely to occur (in this case, making the decision to participate in a positive activity). Common themes shared by different cases were identified according to the process of thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) (see table 3, p. 67). This was used to provide evidence of decision making factors and triangulated against themes drawn out from interviews with two Youth Service Workers and the Head of Sports Specialism at the school, who has responsibility for the Year 7 extended school sports service run on a Thursday evening. The approach to analysis taken was essentially a realist method, in that it was interested in the experiences and reality of the participants (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Table 2: Phases of thematic analysis

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

From Braun and Clarke (2006)

## Results and Discussion

### Which positive activities are the target group involved in?

In each case, a map of a typical week was produced. These were then collated onto two week maps: one representing the activities for the three young people in the free school meal (FSM) group and one for the three young people in the non-free school meal group (Non-FSM).

Table 3: Activity map for the FSM group

Mon	Youth Club (YC) Fashion show health	YC Football training	Private club (PC) Tennis Club (Free)
Tues	School (S) Netball/rounders team	YC Pool tables etc. EPSY	PC Girl's football training
Wed	S Girl's football matches in a league	YC Drama and singing	PC Girl's football training
Thurs	S compulsory Tennis	S compulsory Cheerleading	S compulsory Football
Fri	S netball/rounders team practice	YC Football training	
Sat	YC Football	PC Girls' football Matches	
Sun	YC Multi-sports	Church	

Table 4: Activity map for the Non-FSM group

Mon	PC Football training		
Tues			
Wed			
Thurs	S compulsory	S compulsory	

	Football	Cheerleading	
Fri			
Sat			
Sun			

<p>Key:  S = school-based activity  YC = Youth club-based activity  PC = Private club</p>
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### The activities

The maps show that the vast majority of activities that the young people were involved in were sports-based. Other activities included drama, and youth club based projects, like making clothes for a fashion show and educational programmes (generally about health). Drama, singing and cooking were also mentioned as activities that young people would like to access and/or have accessed but no longer do. Prohibiting factors were reported as being cost and a lack of information.

### The providers

The activities fit into three categories of providers: school; local youth clubs, and private clubs. It was notable that school only provided sports-based activities, with youth clubs offering a wider variety. While the private clubs on the map are only sports-based, private drama and singing clubs were mentioned as activities that had been given up because of cost, or that the young person had not tried because of a lack of information or feeling of shyness.

The school was a sports specialist college with a larger amount of money than non-

sports specialist schools for the provision of sporting activities. In Year 7, the school was running a 'compulsory' sports night after school on Thursdays, where the young people could choose from a range of activities.

The weekly activities maps show that the youth and private clubs were clearly providing a popular service for this group of young people, accounting for 12 of the 20 activities recorded. Five of the school activities were part of the compulsory scheme. In a participants' group discussion of the analysis, five of the six said that they would not be continuing to attend this session when it ceased to be compulsory in Year 8.

None of the six young people were accessing any paying activities.

#### Comparing the two groups

As predicted in the propositions, the literal and theoretical replication groups (Non-FSM and FSM) presented with two different patterns of activity attendance. However, the patterns of attendance did not support the propositions as derived from the literature. There was a much greater level of participation by those young people belonging to the FSM group, where the literature suggested that the opposite would be true. Wikeley et al (2007) found that there was a lower level of participation in his FSM group and attributed this to differences in socio-economic status. All the activities that the young people interviewed were accessing were provided free of charge, negating the practical implications of having less money. Indeed, cases from the Non-FSM group indicated that their parents were supportive and willing to pay for them to attend activities in private clubs, but they still did not attend. The pattern



found in this school suggests that while there appear to be some replicable patterns of attendance within the two types of case, socio-economic status alone is not sufficient to predict attendance levels and other mediating factors need to be considered.

Two differences between the cases in this study and those discussed in the literature are: where they live (locality); and the selective criteria applied regarding the 'typicality' of students. This points towards two possible theories.

Firstly, proposition 3 states that considerations will be linked to aspects of the locality in which young people live and go to school. Proposition 5 states that where young people attend activities some/all of the practicalities relating to lower socio-economic status will have been addressed. It is possible that in this area, improved youth services and access to school activities had successfully targeted those young people who were disadvantaged. The expectation that FSM cases would have a lower attendance rate did not take account of the complex interactions of available services and other local factors such as cultural attitudes towards leisure and providers.

Certainly, young people in the area have received a fair amount of negative media coverage in recent years that may have coloured parents' priorities in how their youngsters' leisure time should be spent. This would be an interesting area for further research.

Secondly, the criteria used to select case studies excluded young people who are

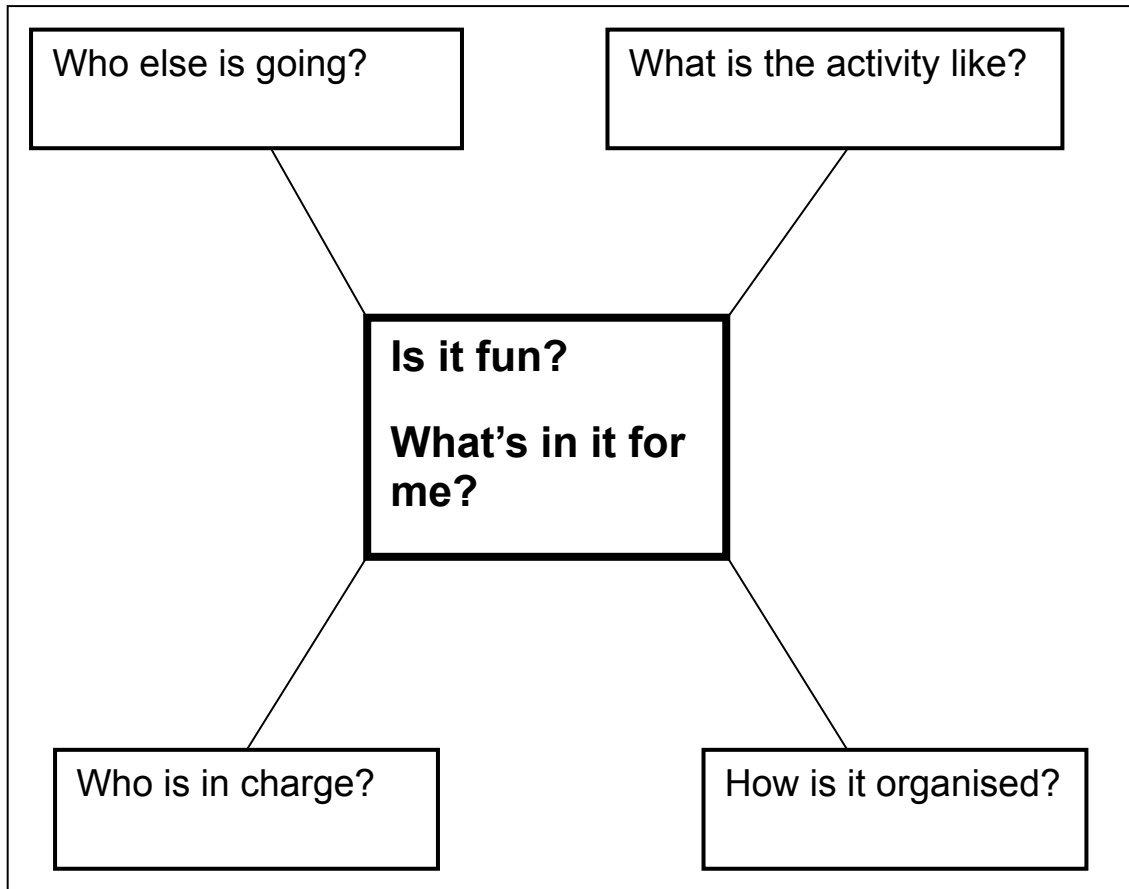
perhaps more typically represented in the research as socially disadvantaged. It may be that the government's focus upon vulnerable groups has meant that this more 'typical' group of young people on FSM has been rarely discussed in the literature.

### **What factors influence the decision to attend a positive activity?**

During the interviews, the young people talked about the reasons why they chose to attend an activity or not, which activities they preferred and why, and about their general experiences. The cross-case thematic analysis allowed me to pool their data and actively develop themes that addressed this research question. The themes did not emerge from the data, but were actively identified by the researcher as part of the analysis process described by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The following thematic map was produced to represent the relationship between the strongest themes that were identified from the interviews.

Diagram 1: Thematic Map of factors influencing decisions to attend positive activities



The central themes: What do I get out of it?

The perceived benefits to the young people were central to their decisions to attend activities. For this group, two main types of benefits were identified: enjoyment and self-improvement. One of the youth service workers summed this up by saying 'there needs to be something that shows there is going to be a social and personal development consequence from meeting you' (interview, 2009).

#### *Central theme 1: Enjoyment*

The factor that was universally referred to was 'fun'. This was closely related to the concept of avoiding boredom.

### *Central theme 2: Self-improvement*

This factor was more complex, with young people volunteering some different categories of development and how that might occur. Areas of potential self-improvement were:

- Health: staying or getting fit; learning about how to make healthier life style choices with regards to substance use, tanning etc.
- Improved confidence and emotional control
- Learning better skills relating to the chosen activity
- Improving life chances: by keeping 'out of trouble' and, in one case, by recognising the potential for curriculum vitae enhancement

Importantly, central to the decision making process was the idea that if an activity was not fun and they could not see what is in it for them, they would not attend. A possible exception to this was when two of the young people continued to attend 'compulsory' extended school activities on a Thursday. They reported that if the activities were not 'compulsory', they would not attend. This concept is explored further under the organisation theme.

### The satellite themes

The four satellite themes are viewed as contributing to the young person's perception of the level of benefits (enjoyment and opportunities for development) offered by an activity. Each one relates to the central decision making theme and to each other in

different ways. They will be presented separately and discussed as a whole, with further triangulation from the interviews with service providers.

*Sub theme 1: Who else is going?*

All the young people interviewed talked about the importance of having friends who also attended a particular activity. The type of statements some young people made demonstrated the importance of this factor as more central to the level of enjoyment experienced than other aspects of the activity. It was a crucial factor for many young people's decisions.

'I wouldn't do it if me mates weren't doing it'  
'I'm not bothered (about there being no more league games), because I can still play with me mates up there.'

The Head of Specialism (H of S) also commented upon this peer effect, pointing out that if one young person from a social group went to an activity, they would probably all go.

For the out-of-school clubs, keeping in touch with friends from primary school and the local area was seen as an important motivating factor for some of the young people. As a result of the way that transition into secondary schools is organised in the area, young people may end up in a different school to at least some, if not most of their friends. Having access to local, out of school activities can help to keep people in contact with each other and the community. Some of the young people felt that they were closer friends with people from their youth club or private club, which may be an important consideration for service provision, particularly during the transition period.

'I'm the only one from (this school). Everyone else is from (a different local school). They're all people from our area. Because of (the youth club), we've been going there since we were five – all of us.... cos it's local – all stuff for us to do and that – helping us to interact with more people and make more friends.'

'I prefer footie out of school. I have more mates out of school – I don't know loads of people in school. Me mates from primary went to different schools.' 'I can catch up with me mates from primary.'

Wider social influences were talked about by the adults interviewed, such as: the influence of the local football culture upon choice of activity for boys especially; the effect of media coverage upon young people's expectations and the community's attitudes towards youngsters.

#### *Sub theme 2: What the activity is*

This theme partly relates to the simple factor of whether or not the young people like the activities or not. Most of the young people mentioned this and were able to identify aspects of activities that they liked or not.

(Drama) 'You get to do shows. It would be fun in front of people.'  
 (Cheerleading) 'You can do lifts.'  
 (Football) 'I like it more than anything else - watching and playing.'  
 'We make all clothes and it's fun. And we go on trips with them and we're doing a big fashion show at the end and I'm singing on me own in it. It's dead good.'  
 (Cross Country) 'Too cold in the winter.'  
 (Clay Tennis) 'Sometimes you hurt yourself if you fall over.'

All the adults concurred that choice of activity is important, advocating consultation with young people to find out what they want (this is further discussed in a later section).

As well as the choice of activity, the young people made a distinction between

training to do something and actually doing it. While some young people felt quite strongly about this, opinion was divided about which type of delivery was the best. Some saw the importance of both. This dichotomy can be mapped onto the development/enjoyment split of the perceived benefits. It is most neatly demonstrated by those young people who are doing both training and playing in matches.

'I prefer Thursday cos you get to play more. Monday is more training. I go on a Monday because I like improving. On a Monday you're taught more things, Thursday, you put it into action.'

The H of S had identified that there were a number of young people who were only interested in doing an activity for leisure, rather than wanting to partake competitively, and who might have been put off by the formality implied by training and having matches. This is a group that may have been previously neglected in school and private club provision, but less so in youth clubs. Two young people described their preference for the more laid back attitude of the youth clubs:

'On a Thursday (at the compulsory school activity), they put you in the team you have to be in. At the youth club, you can go with mates and get a game going on your own.... they set you up, put cones out and stuff for you then go inside and let you have a game, then bring you in and help you get a drink. You can go back out and play again.'

'You can just stop and go and sit in the centre and talk to your mates if you're tired and that.'

It appears in these two young people's descriptions that they valued the youth club as a place to spend time with their friends, as well as partaking in a group activity that they enjoy. The H of S pointed out that she had found that a lot of boys were quite happy to play football when there was not an adult around, but that they simply were

not interested in attending school clubs.

However, other young people enjoy the competition element of an activity and would have stopped attending if this element was removed.

A related issue for youth services is that their some of their targets are dependant upon young people receiving accreditation for positive activities. As has been demonstrated here, such formality is not attractive to all young people (despite being a motivating factor for some others). One of the youth services talked about how the requirement to have young people receiving accreditations could actually be a barrier to providing services that would be most effective in engaging the government's target young people (the more vulnerable groups).

'While accreditation can be valuable for some kids, it's not appropriate for all. Kids can find success frightening - find self-praise difficult – they don't want to stand out. What is important is the distance travelled for the young person.'

The decision making factors presented here suggest that each local area needs a variety of options available to young people that include competitive and non-competitive opportunities to explore the kinds of leisure activities they would like to engage in. However, the cases looked at here still indicate that this theme was considered after social factors.

### *Sub theme 3: The person in charge*

The importance of this factor was demonstrated in the Year 8 activity evaluation. Out



of about 50 female responses, 30 gave the trampolining activity a five (the top mark). When the Head of Specialism read the comments that had been written on the forms, the girls were specifying that they wanted to do trampolining 'with that bloke', leading her to the conclusion that personnel may be an important factor in the young people's decision making. The same was also true from the other perspective, with one of the boys sports scoring significantly lower than the rest. The Head of Specialism hypothesised that this would be due to delivery rather than the activity itself.

This theory concurs with the comments made by the young people in this group about the adults in charge of activities. The young people were concerned with personal delivery style, using terms such as 'narky', 'angry', 'strict' and 'boring', as opposed to, 'fun'. They did not like adults who shouted at them for getting something wrong, 'like when you make a bad pass', or who told them what to do too much. However, the same young people were clear that they preferred the adult to maintain a certain level of control to help the young people to access the activity:

'you get a bit wary if teacher is (strict), but it's alright to shout at you if you're swearing or shouting or something.'

'If you do something wrong she gets angry - but you're trying so.. She wants us to get it right and understand instructions. If she said nothing - we'd go wild.'

One of the young people gave an example where he had stopped attending an activity he enjoyed because the new instructor 'told you what to do all the time', but others were more tolerant, suggesting that in some cases at least, this factor is not as important as others.

'If someone's strict then that makes you more wary - if you do something wrong then they shout at you, but you go anyway if your mates are there'

The balance between the desire for a more informal relationship with the adult in charge, but for control to be maintained reflects the balance of the central valued benefits of self-improvement and enjoyment.

The youth service workers' comments reflect a much more elaborate picture of the role and crucial importance of the young people's relationship with the facilitating adult. 'Trust, consistency and following through on promises' were identified as the most important factor. In addition, it was felt that there needed to be transparency:

'Young people are able to see through people, so it is important to be honest about your agenda, boundaries, and your own mistakes. Modelling how to take responsibility for your own behaviour.'

and that a sharing of responsibility for the upkeep of a positive relationship:

'Ownership of the relationship is important – give them joint responsibility for maintaining the relationship..'

Only one of the young people referred to the personal relationship between the adult and themselves. This was in terms of the emotional support that workers at the youth club might offer.

*'They do loads of other things so they know what to do and they always say that if anything is going on at home, you're allowed to tell them but if its serious they'll have to tell the police. They can help you with things. They make you feel comfortable. If you don't want to tell your parents or something.'*

It may be that the personal relationship between the young person and the adult in charge is more important in the youth club context, particularly where there is an emphasis upon social and health education, such as drug and alcohol use (as in this case), or where the target group may be seen as vulnerable in some way (i.e. not the group currently under discussion).

Both the school and the youth services talked about the importance of facilitators having community links, both in terms of relationship building, 'it helps to have a familiar face' and in order to allow the young people to take activities further at a coaches local club.

#### *Sub theme 4: The way the activity is organised*

This category is spread over a number of sub-themes that have presented as important .

Most commonly referred to was the level of choice the young people feel that they have. How voluntary is attendance? While the youth club workers both emphasised the importance of the voluntary nature of attendance for most of their cohort;

*'The voluntary aspect of youth services helps – the importance of the choice – in terms of accepting boundaries set by the adult for example.'*

the activity maps from the first research question show that the compulsory extended

school activities have succeeded in pulling in attendance from five out of the six young people, with no FSM divide. Only two of the young people spoke about the compulsory aspect of the Thursday night activities, both of whom had busy weeks at outside school clubs for the rest of the week. It may be that for these young people, (one of whom does not tend to attend the Thursday night activities), the compulsory nature of Thursdays does not compare favourably with their other clubs. However, for some of the other young people, it was their only positive activity for the week. The other active (i.e. Non-FSM) young person said that she enjoyed both types of activities.

Another aspect of choice is involving the young people in the decision making process regarding the activities. All the adults talked about the importance of this as central to what they were doing, via negotiation, consultation and evaluations. The Head of Specialism said;

'With girls, I try to get them all together and try to give them some ownership of it. Involving them in choosing what to do. It's overcoming inertia by giving ownership'

Another organisational factor relates to where the services are based. Two young people mentioned locality in terms of practicality and keeping links with other people in the area.

The adults also felt that how the space was defined might have given school-based activities a disadvantage. One aspect of this was related to what the H of S described as 'the culture of not staying behind'. She did not believe it was a problem with the

school premises per se, but rather just a script the young people have that says 'we go home at 2:45'.

The youth services talked about a problem with leisure centres outside of school being mainly set up for adults. In addition it was thought that youngsters get treated with suspicion, because of a negative representation of youth in the media. The youth service representative believed that the city in which they were based had suffered particularly from the recent media attention given to supposed gang culture activity in the area. In his experience, this impression was not based upon what young people were really doing in the area but was largely a media-informed construction.

Another organisational consideration is the age of the young people when they are recruited. It was agreed that getting young people involved in year 6/7 was important and providing a structure to keep them involved as they get older. Both school and youth services had developed schemes for trying to facilitate this. One young person described how this works in her local youth club:

'Those people who do drama they pay, but the other ones are kids who are like me, and they went off to work there, and they get cvs for it if you keep going. When you're 15 you go to the higher group and you learn about health and nutrition and that and have people come in and tell you about it and you go on trips and that - it's good I'm going to carry on cos I want to be a mentor to help get proper job'

At the school, The H of S described the coaching system they use to keep young people involved:

'Year 7s can lead own activities or coach others. It's another string to their bow. Some can coach and teach better than they can do it. There will be coaching opportunities as they go up the school. They deliver young leaders award in primary's in year 7 '

Finally, some of the young people decided not to attend certain activities because of other commitments in their lives, such as needing to pick up a little sister from school. The out-of-school activities seemed to have an advantage for this particular FSM youngster simply because of the more convenient timings. Other considerations were time clashes with other activities (FSM group) and homework demands (one Non-FSM young person).

### **How could we get more young people to attend?**

In addition to the themes described above, the young people were invited to suggest any ways that they thought access to positive activities could be improved. Contrary to expectations, the young people did not report many practical reasons for not attending positive activities. The young people in the FSM group had been able to overcome the sort of practical barriers to attendance described in the literature (e.g. Ridge, 2002), because the youth club activities were all locally based and free and when team-based, private club activities required one young person to travel to matches, she described how people would share lifts to make sure everyone could attend.

Interestingly, the Non-FSM group tended to report a lack of information about available activities, while the FSM group described the youth services innovative recruitment drives and word of mouth as ways of being informed.

'I don't know of any drama clubs.... my dad offered to pay for any clubs, but I don't hear of any.'

' I heard through a friend - filled in a form and started going. It's free. One of me mates from primary school rang me and told me they'd started it so I started going.' (Football)

'For Monday and Wednesdays, they (the youth club) send letters out, and at half term they do a club in there with all games and that and they get people in to do drama and that....of a Friday people go round getting all the boys off the street and say come in and we'll do go karting or something to get them off the street. They go in all the little places where they know they'll be'

All the young people made some suggestions for how attendance might be improved.

There was a recommendation that service providers needed to 'try and persuade' young people to join in things, and that 'encouragement would help'. This included making activities 'look really fun!' and making them more inclusive, by inviting more people to take part and giving them 'more things to do – something that everyone will enjoy.'

The two different youth clubs I spoke to reinforced this message, talking about their own recruitment techniques for difficult to reach youngsters:

'You have to do carrot dangling – say you'll meet after school, bring them to a football match, something to get them engaged'

' The project doesn't take referrals but actually goes out into the streets at night to 'recruit'. They will start a conversation with a group of young people and work from what they are interested in....Going to the kids own patch is important – going into their space in order to give them the opportunity to get involved in something that is not in their space. '

The difference in reported awareness of available activities suggests that the youth services are successfully fulfilling the government's criteria for targeting young people from more socially disadvantaged backgrounds, but may also add evidence to the idea purported in the conceptualisation of this piece of research, that there is a hidden group of young people who are not targeted because they do not belong to any of the more visible 'vulnerable' groups. The value of the school's compulsory activities is that these children are being successfully recruited for one night a week at least. Further investigation into the reasons why this identified group is not partaking in the same activities as the FSM group would be useful.

## **Conclusions**

The results from this case study offer support for the underlying theory that local solutions are needed to local issues. The perceived effect of being more economically disadvantaged (crudely measured by the FSM /non-FSM dichotomy) upon level of attendance was in the opposite direction to the results found by Wikeley (2007) in his similarly designed study. The presence of an effect does support the idea that there is a difference in how the two groups access positive activities, presenting the challenge of ensuring that both groups are engaged. However, the direction of the effect suggests that there are other factors involved in the decision making process than economic status alone, requiring a more complex model to account for local factors specific to the cohort.

One reason why the propositions extracted from the literature were not well-supported by the evidence collected might be that youth services and the extended



school 'compulsory' activity night for year 7s have been successful in addressing some of the practical barriers reported in previous studies, such as Ridge (2002). There is a wide range of free activities available and resources targeting socially disadvantaged groups that seem to be easily accessible for this 'typical' cohort, if they are motivated to do so. However, current youth and private services do not appear to be engaging the middle group of young people; those who are not from affluent families, but who are affluent enough to not be eligible for FSM.

The unpredicted result in terms of the direction of the effect of membership to each of the replication groups (literal or theoretical) suggests that the criteria used to select participants may have identified a section of socially disadvantaged young people who are not generally represented in the literature. The small scale nature of the research limits any generalisations that can be made, but similarly, the very case-specific results question the effectiveness of applying larger scale, reductionist findings to local, specific cases.

In addition to the recommendations suggested by the young people in the section of the analysis entitled 'How could we get more young people to attend?', a clear message was given about the importance of friendship in young people's decision making. The fact that youth services tend to be attached to areas rather than secondary schools may be a factor in defining its separate role and appeal. They may have a particular role to play in helping young people to maintain important friendships from primary school, which could help to lessen the impact of transition into secondary schools. Targeting young people before transition may be important for this purpose.

It was clear in the data that, while patterns occurred, each child had a unique set of circumstances that affected their decisions, highlighting the need for a range of activities across settings.

Scoping constraints meant that parent's views were not collected. Potentially, parents may exert some considerable influence upon their children's capacity to make certain decisions and may have quite a different set of criteria. Future research might investigate the extent of the affect of negative media representations of the area's youth culture upon parents' own decision making processes regarding their offspring's level of participation in freely available services. It is possible that more affluent parents in such an area feel that their children are vulnerable in such settings and this may go part of the way to explain the unexpected results obtained here.

### **Critique of the methodology**

Thematic analysis is interpretative and cannot escape the subjective nature of the categorising decisions that I made. While a post-analysis feedback session allowed some reassurance that the young people's views and experiences were represented fairly, the methodology adopted accepts that every step of the process is affected by my own perspectives and experiences.

The case study approach taken in this piece of research is limited in terms of its generalisability. However, the approach allowed for an open exploration of the research questions that was nonetheless theoretically underpinned and directed. It gave a locality and cohort specific description of the unit of analysis, which is

inkeeping with the participatory stance taken by Aiming High for Young People and the wider Every Child Matters agenda.

### **Concluding comment**

Young people in the area where this research was based have often been portrayed in a negative light by the media. It is strength of the current study that it has produced a picture of a group of relatively socially disadvantaged young people contradicting stereotypes and making positive choices about how to spend their leisure time. In addition, the results reflect positively upon the work of service providers in finding creative solutions to engage and enable young people in the area to participate.

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## CONCLUDING CHAPTER

The work contained in this volume advocates the use of interpretive approaches to research that reflect the principles upon which recent government policy relating to the provision of youth services claims to be underpinned by. It draws attention to a mismatch between these principles and much of the research epistemologies that the Aiming High for Young People paper refers to. The study undertaken as part of this volume of work demonstrates the importance of locally focussed research.

Part of the distinctive contribution of this work is the exclusive concentration upon a very specific area: geographically and demographically. The fact that the study was only interested in a particular group of 'typical' young people living in a disadvantaged area may have led to the unexpected reversal of the usual pattern of positive activity engagement. It was pleasing for me as a researcher and psychologist to be able to positively represent the views and level of engagement of a group of young people that are all too often described in negative terms by research and the media. As one young person is quoted as saying in the Aiming High for Young People green paper, "Of all the young people in newspapers, TV and radio, none of them represent any of my friends, or any younger person I know." (DCSF, 2007, pge. 5). This research challenges representations of socially disadvantaged young people in the media and literature as over simplifications that do not provide a fair or useful contribution to understanding how this group engages in positive activities.

In fact, the resulting picture suggests that further investigation is needed to ascertain why those young people who are considered to be less socially disadvantaged (who



are not in receipt of free school meals) in a generally disadvantaged area are not accessing the youth services available. It would be informative to study parents' perceptions of youth services in the area, how they are formed and how this influences their children's poor access of the many activities on offer in the area.

It was also gratifying to represent the views of dedicated professionals, creatively and successfully engaging with young people in the area.

### **Implications for practice**

The volume highlights the importance of young people being able to use activities socially. In the area where the study was based, a particular issue concerning transition into secondary school was indicated, where young people can end up in different secondary schools to their friends. The young people were able to communicate the importance of non-school positive activity settings for maintaining friendships in Year 7. This is an important insight for service providers to consider when planning the location and access criteria for resources.

Educational psychologists are well placed to conduct the types of qualitative, small scale research projects that would help inform an empowering, universal approach to promoting positive activities. Through research methods that seek to listen to the voices of all young people, a more representative and positive perspective of their attitudes and experiences may emerge to challenge some of the stereotypes in the media and research literature.

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## Appendix 1

# Protocol

## Overview of the case study project:

### The Policy Context

Since the publication of Every Child Matters (DfES, 2003), the government has identified extra-curricular activities as a potential mediating factor in the association between economic disadvantage and poorer outcomes.

More recently, a number of policies and initiatives have been designed to address the idea that children from disadvantaged backgrounds do not have the same opportunities outside the school curriculum and that this contributes to poorer outcomes. Some of the relevant policies are briefly summarised in the appendix, including: Youth Matters (2005); Positive Activities for Young People; and Aiming High for Young People (2007).

In response to the proposition that all LAs will be responsible for removing barriers to access for all young people, made in Aiming High for Young People (DCSF, 2007), this research aims to explore what those barriers are and how they might be overcome, at a local level

### Other Studies in this Area

There is a wide body of studies that have investigated the link between extra-curricular activities and better outcomes for young people. These have tended to use largely positivist, statistical approaches. The 'Aiming High for Young People' paper tends to reference these types of studies, including: Eccles et al's 2003 paper, 'Extracurricular Activities (ECA) and Adolescent Development.', Feinstein and Robson's report, 'Leisure Contexts in Adolescence and their Effects on Adult Outcomes' (2005) and Margo and Dixon's 'Freedom's Orphans', a report produced by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), published in 2006. These statistical analytical studies provide support for the proposal that extra curricular activities are beneficial to young people and offer interesting theoretical models for understanding the relationship between concepts of poverty and achievement. This provides a good foundation for more in depth, qualitative studies of young people's experiences of disadvantage and positive activities.

A second group of studies use qualitative methods, such as Sutton et al's (2007) paper, 'A child's-eye view of social difference': a participatory study, mainly concentrating upon issues around how poverty is conceptualised, while making some reference to children's views about after school activities. The most relevant study to this piece of work is Wikeley et al's study 'Educational Relationships Outside School: Why access is important' (2007).

Wikeley et al (2007) attempted to compare the experiences of rural and suburban children, as well as those from relatively affluent or poor backgrounds, recognising the diversity within the population categorised as living in relative poverty and

highlighting the need to conduct research in different cultural contexts. In asking 'What do young people gain from engagement in out-of-school activities?', Wikeley et al found that young people valued and benefited from:

- Having responsibilities
- A greater sense of identity – this was demonstrated through a shared vocabulary, skills and purpose
- A sense of making a contribution to the adult world
- Greater self-control and confidence – the young people tended to accept the discipline expectations in ECA, which was linked to the perception that adult participation was also seen as voluntary and part of a more equal power relationship.
- An awareness of learning within a clear structure for progression in some cases, that increases motivation
- The development of positive relationships with adult and others that contributes to the development of soft skills.

Wikeley et al (2007) found that children from less affluent backgrounds were less likely to attend organised after-school provision. They were more reliant on Extra Curricular Activities provided by school, which could be a factor for low attendance (fear of being labelled a swot, negative association with school in general.) Other factors identified were: transport, cost, lack of time available due to complex family structures.

As well as exploring the barriers to access to positive activities for young people, Wikeley et al asked what it was that provided the main impetus for starting and then maintaining involvement in an activity. The main factor for starting to participate was social, while for continued commitment was enjoyment and parental support.

### **Research aims and methodology**

The research will aim to find out what opportunities to engage in positive activities (as defined by the document 'Aiming High for Young People', DCSF, 2008) young people in XXXXXX are aware of and what young people perceive as the barriers to access and supporting factors for participation in these activities. The aim of the study is not to generate data that is generalisable to a much larger population, but rather to enrich our understanding of local issues in order to inform local solutions. The main research questions will be:

The case study uses an exploratory multi-case replication method. This case study approach affords an opportunity to report the detailed and complex experiences of young people in this area. Each of 6 participants will be asked to provide information about the activities they have engaged in over a week and be given an individual interview guided by the research questions. As an exploratory piece of work, an open interview format will be used. As each pupil is regarded as a single case, this will allow more flexibility to follow emerging and/or unexpected themes within an interview and in subsequent cases.<sup>1</sup>

Participant selection will be based upon a best fit for the following criteria and will be

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<sup>1</sup> This is a similar process to the one used by Wikeley et al in their 2008 study (see literature review).

judged by school staff:

- Year 7
- Attending Archbishop Beck High School
- Not accessing specifically targeted services (e.g. LAC, YOT)
- Not regarded as challenging or gifted by staff at the school
- Likely to have the desire to participate in positive activities

In addition, 3 pupils who are considered to be from socio-economically deprived backgrounds and 3 who are considered to be from more affluent backgrounds will be selected. Free School Meals may help to guide selection.

Finally, key informants or participants will be invited to comment upon my data analysis. This is in order to increase the construct validity of the research by minimising the assumptions made in interpreting the data. It also increases the participation of the pupils.

#### Field Procedures

- Interviews will take place in the English Department room opposite the head of year's classroom. The head of year will arrange for the interviewee to be brought to the room
- First, a map of the activities the young person typically engages in will be drawn
- Next, the interview will start, with reference to the research questions:
  - What positive activities are the target group involved in?
  - What makes or would make the young people want to attend a positive activity?
  - Are there activities available that the target group are not accessing that they would like to access?
  - Why are they not accessing these activities?
  - How could access be improved?
- Further (level 1) questions will be asked in order to explore the interviewees responses and to follow any new lines of interest.

Responses should be checked for correct understanding of intended meaning. Interviewees will be invited to a post-analysis focus group.

Recordings will be transcribed immediately after the interview has finished.

## Appendix 2

### Public Domain Briefing for critical literature review – for potential stakeholders in research

#### Positive activities and outcomes for young people – what the literature says

As part of my doctoral thesis, I have carried out a literature review taking a close look at some of the evidence around the recent push for getting young people involved in positive activities.

I am using the term positive activities because that is the language used in the government policy papers that address the topic. A positive activity is extra-curricular. It can happen through school, youth services, or any other organisation, but it must be supervised by an adult.

Initially, the idea for this review came from discussions with two young people I met through my work as a trainee educational psychologist. They reported being unable to access local activities because of feeling unsafe in the areas in which they lived. As a result of this conversation I consulted the Government guidance about positive activities for young people (DCFS, 2007) and was concerned that much of the large scale research that was referred to in it did not necessarily relate to the issues faced by young people in this particular area. Among other things, the youth culture in the area had received negative media attention which may have posed an additional dimension to the challenge of getting young people to engage in positive activities.

#### Policy

The importance of young people engaging in positive activities has been rubber stamped in government policy. Since the publication of *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003), the government has named positive activities as a factor that contributes to the link between economic disadvantage and poorer outcomes for young people. Children who come from better off backgrounds tend to do more extra-curricular activities and be more successful.

A number of policies and initiatives have been designed to address the idea that children from disadvantaged backgrounds do not have the same opportunities outside the school curriculum and that this contributes to poorer outcomes, such as *Youth Matters* (2005); *Positive Activities for Young People*; and *Aiming High for Young People* (2007).

*Youth Matters (2005)*: *Youth Matters* presents the government's proposals for a 'radical reshaping' of services for young people aged 13-19, including a chapter titled, 'Empowering Young People: Things to do and Places to go' (*Youth Matters*, 2005, pp. 25-39).

*Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP)* was a three year long project targeted young people at risk from social exclusion and community crime, providing holiday and after school activities. The funding ended in 2006 and service level agreements were made. Overall, this programme was considered to be a success, leading to a range of positive outcomes for the young people involved.

*Aiming High for Young People: a ten year strategy for positive activities (2007)*

This document describes the government's 'vision for young people', which aims to 'transform the leisure-time opportunities for young people in England' (DCSF, 2007: p. 3). The paper directly links the governmental strategy to the five outcomes described in *Every Child Matters*. It states that involvement in positive activities should enhance the experiences of all young people, while recognising that there is a need to focus resources upon providing support and opportunities for those for whom the vision they describe will be more difficult to achieve. In particular, the document refers to those children and young people from disadvantaged socio-economical backgrounds.

Aiming High for Young People describes how local areas are and should be developing local integrated youth services. One of the aims of this process is the provision of a range of positive leisure activities for young people by 2008, with Local Authorities having a duty to ensure that young people have access to those activities.

### **The literature**

What I found was that much of the literature upon which this policy is based comes from large scale, quantitative studies that make broad generalisations about the behaviour patterns of socially disadvantaged young people. My argument is that these studies over simplify what it is to be socially disadvantaged. It does not seem to me that there is one homogenous group that fit neatly into such a category. When I started to look further into this topic, I came across a number of different theories that tried to tackle the subject of how to define poverty. It's complex. Being poor in a small country village will not be the same as it is for a young person in this area. They will face a wholly different range of difficulties and advantages. Being poor in the south of the city will not be the same as being poor in the north. Being poor and involved in criminal activity will not be the same as being poor and living in proximity to that activity. There are an infinite number of permutations that could describe a person's experience of being 'socially disadvantaged'. So while it may be useful to lump people together for some statistical analyses, when it comes to thinking of strategies for providing services to young people, it is clear that local research that looks at local needs is required.

The other danger of not separating out the different ways of being socially disadvantaged is that young people end up being tarred with same brush. Recent negative media coverage of this area in particular has promoted an image of them that must be difficult to stomach and difficult to resist. By looking at different experiences of living in the area, a more realistic and positive picture of the area can be promoted and help to improve people's expectations and so their capabilities.

Another group of studies have used qualitative methods to look at young people's experiences of positive activities. On the whole, these studies accept the positive link between activities and outcomes exists and are interested in looking in more depth at what is involved from a more personal perspective. This research tells us that there are often practical, financial barriers to attending positive activities, such as transport, equipment costs and so on. They also told us something about the reasons why young people might want to attend activities. Wikeley et al found that young people valued and benefited from:

- Having responsibilities
- A greater sense of identity – this was demonstrated through a shared vocabulary, skills and purpose
- A sense of making a contribution to the adult world
- Greater self-control and confidence – the young people tended to accept the discipline expectations in ECAs, which was linked to the perception that adult participation was also seen as voluntary and part of a more equal power relationship.
- An awareness of learning within a clear structure for progression in some cases, that increases motivation
- The development of positive relationships with adult and others that contributes to the development of soft skills.

Wikeley et al (2007) also found that children from less affluent backgrounds were less likely to attend organised after-school provision. They were more reliant on Extra Curricular Activities provided by school, which could be a factor for low attendance (fear of being labelled a swot, negative association with school in general.) Other factors identified were: transport, cost, lack of time available due to complex family structures.

While this research is a useful starting point for investigating positive activity attendance, I believe that a more focussed approach is needed to directly address the very particular set of circumstances that our young people face in this area.

Future research may explore the social categories used by children and young people to describe their own circumstances and any links to participation in and experience of positive activities.

A more detailed description of the relevant factors to promoting or barring participation within specific cultural contexts may provide practical and relevant recommendations for the neighbourhood directive to fulfil their duty to provide access to positive activities for all, according to the principles of empowerment, access and quality (DCSF, 2007).



## Appendix 2

### PowerPoint Public Domain Briefing for Young People in Year 7



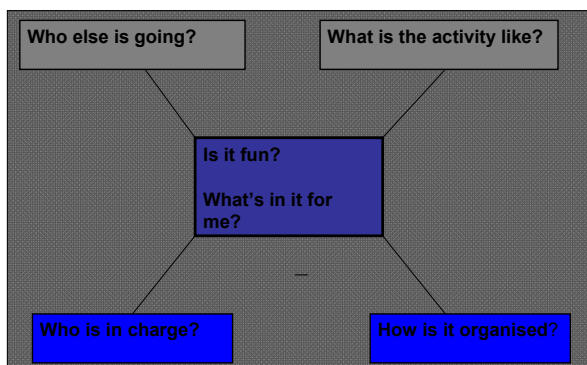
How do you decide which activities to go to?

Findings from the interviews

#### The two most important factors:

- Is it fun?
- What's in it for me?
  - Get fit
  - More confidence
  - Learn to control anger
  - Get better skills
  - Keep out of trouble
  - Get a good c.v.

#### Four satellite themes:



## 1: Who else is going?

- 'I wouldn't do it if me mates weren't doing it.'  
(Everyone mentioned this!)
- 'I can catch up with me mates from primary.'  
  - Lots of kids end up at different primary schools.
  - Out-of-school clubs are good for keeping in touch with friends from Primary school and the local area.
- This is FUN!

## 2: What's the activity like?

- It's important that you like the activity!
- PLAYING VERSUS TRAINING
  - Some of you like training
  - Some of you like doing (playing)
  - Some like both
  - Some like playing matches in leagues
  - Some just want to play for fun
- It fits into the central factors in the diagram! – FUN vs BETTER SKILLS



## 2: What's the activity like?

- But this is less important than whether or not your friends do the activity!



### 3: Who's in charge?

- Good:
  - Fun

- Bad:
  - Angry
  - Strict
  - Boring



You don't want to be shouted at if you do something wrong, but you do want the adult to be in control so you can learn and get on with it.

RELAXED ADULT VS ADULT IN CONTROL

Fits with...

FUN vs BETTER SKILLS!

### 3: Who's in charge?

One of you stopped going to an activity because the adult was too strict...

But most of you thought it was more important that you had...

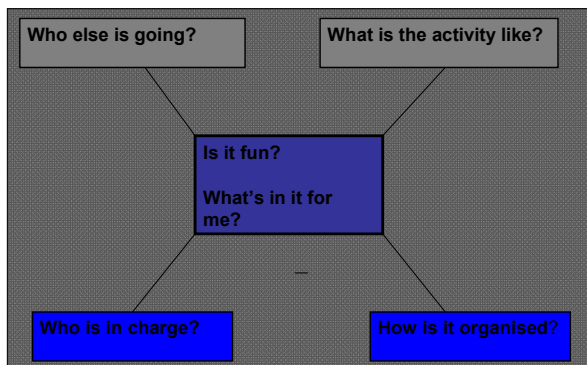


Is it more important in a youth club than at school activities?

#### 4: How is it organised?

- Voluntary or compulsory?
  - Do you have to go?
  - It only seemed to matter if you were busy the rest of the week.
- Do you get to chose the activity?
- Where is the activity run? Distance and type of building.
- When are they run? Some people have other commitments.

#### How do you make the decision?



#### How can we get more people to attend?

- More information?
- Youth services seem well advertised!
- More encouragement
- Make it look fun
- Invite more people

Appendix 4

Instructions for authors taken from the Educational Psychology in Practice Journal, applicable to Part 1 of this volume.

Not available in the digital version of this thesis

Appendix 5

Instructions for authors taken from the Journal of Adolescent Research, applicable to Part 2 of this volume.

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