

# Experiments in Engagement:

Review of literature around engagement with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds

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## Introduction

In 2011 the Wellcome Trust commissioned two reports to review what science learning opportunities exist outside schooling in the UK, who is engaging with them and what impact these activities have on young people's interest in science.

These reports found that young people from low socio-economic status (SES) families are less likely to have access to informal science learning opportunities, which places them at an educational and, in the long term, economic disadvantage. The Wellcome Trust has therefore identified a need to conduct further research with young people from low SES families to establish how they can be best engaged with informal science learning opportunities.

The results of these two reports have been pulled together into a practically-oriented summary, which includes recommendations for applying this learning to informal science engagement.

This paper reviews the relevant literature and identifies areas where there are gaps in knowledge or where previous research needs updating.

## Contents

Literature relevance .....	4
Engaging young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.....	5
Why is science important? .....	5
Why we are concerned about socio-economic status.....	6
The importance of engagement in activities and informal learning opportunities .....	8
The lifestyles of young people from low SES families .....	9
Young people from low SES families engaging in activities and informal learning opportunities .....	9
Barriers to engaging in activities for low SES young people.....	10
Engaging children and young people from disadvantaged communities.....	14
Conclusions .....	23
References.....	24

## Literature relevance

This paper aims to evaluate relevant literature to establish what is already known about young people in the UK aged 5 to 19 from low socio-economic status (SES) families.

We are looking for:

- how young people from low SES families live their lives, what they like to do, where they spend their time, their attitudes to life, formal and informal education, their aspirations for the future
- who they spend their time with, what or who influences them, who they look up to
- what challenges they face, in particular in engaging with informal education and cultural offerings
- their experience of interacting with cultural offerings; how they interact, who or what influences their choices and what benefits they perceive from these interactions.

## Engaging young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds

### Why is science important?

#### science

Pronunciation: /'saɪəns/

noun

*“the intellectual and practical activity encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behaviour of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment”*

(Oxford English Dictionary)

Science is at the heart of everything in our lives. It is in the food that we eat, the houses that we live in, the vehicles that we travel in, the medicines that save us and the plethora of technology that surrounds us every day. Science enables us to make sense of the world, develop new ideas and transform our environment.

Science is also at the heart of our future and it is vitally important that we engage young people with science to ensure the brightest minds of subsequent generations are able to become the inventors and pioneers of the future. Science qualifications also tend to provide many transferable skills and are well regarded by employers (Archer, 2013). However, the shortage of those with the technical and graduate level skills in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) is of great concern in the UK (BIS, 2009; CBI, 2012; HM Treasury, 2006).

So why is science not capturing the minds of our young people? The majority of young children have positive attitudes to science at age 10 but this interest then declines sharply and by age 14, their attitude and interest in the study of science has been largely formed (Archer et al., 2010). As such, the ages of 10 to 14 are a critical time in the formation of science aspirations. Engaging young people with science in early secondary school is therefore vitally important.

There is evidence that SES can have a profound impact on students' engagement with science. A review of the relationship between SES and participation in science education by The Royal Society (2008) found that there is a clear difference in attainment levels for science between students from low SES as compared to high SES families. Whilst this difference in attainment is also seen in other subjects and is therefore not unique, the report did suggest that the gap for science could be more persistent as compared to other subjects.

Archer et al. (2010) showed that the educational choices of young people are affected by powerful attitudinal biases both within themselves ('not for people like me') and those around them, including parents, peers and teachers. This suggests that strategies to engage young people from low SES families need to not only tackle the attitudes of the young people themselves, but also their surrounding network of influencers.

A Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE) report on socio-economic diversity in STEM Higher Education (Kingsley, 2012) highlighted that salaries in STEM careers are almost 20 per cent higher than those for other fields. This is of particular importance for

young people from low SES families as better earnings may provide them with a way out of economic inequality. This report also found that some areas of science (in particular Physical, Mathematical, Engineering and Technological sciences) are characterised by lower than average numbers of students from low SES families.

Much of the current literature is concerned with formal science education, as opposed to informal science learning. The Wellcome Trust (2012a) highlights that evidence supporting the importance of informal science learning does exist. However, much of it is from sources outside the UK and even less is available about young people from low SES families. This research showed that whilst many informal science institutions do conduct evaluation of their offerings, the majority of these are assessing short-term outcomes to feed into improved or new service delivery. Assessment of the longer term impacts on learning or behaviour is very limited, which appears to be primarily due to funding constraints, but also due to the difficulty in designing and implementing such studies in a robust and reliable manner.

Interestingly, research has shown a strong link between visits by children to museums and galleries and participation in the arts as adults. Oskala et al. (2009) conducted analysis of data from the Taking Part Survey, a large-scale survey of cultural participation conducted by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The analysis showed that being encouraged by parents to participate in arts activities (e.g. drawing, writing stories, music, acting, dancing) and attend arts events (e.g. exhibitions, theatre, music, carnivals, arts festivals) when growing up has a strong influence on the chances of being an active arts consumer as an adult, second only to education. This effect is seen even when all other factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, social status, income and education are taken into account.

Whilst this is not specifically about engagement with informal science learning opportunities, it could be suggested that similar principles may apply and it would be an interesting point for future research.

### **Why we are concerned about socio-economic status**

*“The yawning gap between the educational achievement of poor children and their more affluent peers remains a complex and seemingly intractable problem.”*

(Perry and Francis, 2010, p. 5)

Socio-economic status (SES) for young people is usually defined by the occupation, education level and income level of their parent(s) (Gorard and Huat See, 2009) or can be indicated by another representative measure such as entitlement to free school meals (FSMs) (The Royal Society, 2008).

Children and young people living in socio-economically disadvantaged communities face many challenges arising from poverty and other associated difficulties. Those living in

relative poverty<sup>1</sup> are vulnerable to a range of negative outcomes which frequently persist into adulthood as noted by Darton et al. (2003) who stated that:

*“Poverty in Britain is inextricably intertwined with disadvantages in health, housing, education and other aspects of life. It is hard for people who lack resources to take advantage of the opportunities available to the rest of society.”*

(Darton, et al., 2003: 9)

There is a large body of research noting differences between the lives of individuals who are of a lower and higher SES, and a number of reviews of literature and data in this area already exist (Carter-Wall and Whitfield, 2012; Goodman and Gregg, 2010; Perry and Francis, 2010; Johnson and Kossykh, 2008). Those from low SES families can face social, economic and cultural exclusion and often suffer from poorer educational, employment and physical and mental health outcomes (Johnson and Kossykh, 2008).

*“It is part of Britain’s DNA that everyone should have a fair chance in life. Yet too often demography is destiny in our country. Being born poor often leads to a lifetime of poverty. Poor schools ease people into poor jobs. Disadvantage and advantage cascade down the generations.”*

(Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2013, p.1)

Certain groups are more likely to experience poverty: children living with lone parents, in workless households or children from ethnic minority families (Kenway and Palmer, 2007), in particular Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Black ethnic groups.

There is also an established link between educational under-achievement and low income.

*“Poorer children fall behind in development before the age of 3, and never catch up again. Educational attainment gaps result in low social mobility. Only one in eight children from low-income homes goes on to achieve a high income as an adult.”*

(Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2013, p. 10)

In 2012, an average of just 35 per cent of pupils eligible for FSM gained five GCSEs at grades A\* to C including English & maths (compared to 63 per cent for all other pupils), and in 15 local authorities no more than a quarter did so (Ofsted, 2013). This problem is not just an urban challenge – the 20 poorest performing local authorities vary in size, density of population and geographical location (Ofsted, 2013), showing that both urban and rural areas can face similar issues. Inner cities are no longer the only areas which face significant poverty and some of the poorest places in England now are coastal towns, where declining tourism and property slumps have left them amongst the most economically and educationally deprived areas in the country (Centre for Social Justice, 2013).

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<sup>1</sup> A number of definitions of relative poverty exist. Broadly it refers to those living below a defined level of income relative to the average.



The latest government figures suggest that one in four children are living in poverty<sup>2</sup> in the UK – that's 3.5 million children (Department for Work and Pensions, 2013). Successive governments have tried hard to tackle the issue and it features prominently in the manifestos of the three main parties, however this number appears to be increasing not decreasing (Carter-Wall and Whitfield, 2012). It is therefore clear that the SES of young people, and its impacts, are of vital concern to the future of the UK. In particular, strategies to help these young people change their lives and find their way out of poverty are important for the future of the individuals themselves and to the UK as a whole.

### **The importance of engagement in activities and informal learning opportunities**

*“A multi-agency approach is needed to improve the quality of life in neighbourhoods, which recognises that while crime and safety is part of the problem, wider community issues such as activities for children and young people play a big part.”*

(Neighbourhood crime and anti-social behaviour, Audit Commission, 2006).

Two reports commissioned by the Wellcome Trust show how engagement in cultural activities outside of formal learning in school is important for the educational outcomes of young people (Wellcome Trust, 2012a, Wellcome Trust, 2012b). These reports highlight that young people, even when in full time education, only spend 18 per cent of their waking hours in school, leaving a huge amount of time for informal learning opportunities. A large part of that available learning time is during school holidays and in particular the summer holidays. A wide body of evidence exists which show the positive impact that learning experiences during the summer holidays can have on student performance (Wellcome Trust, 2012b).

The cognitive consequences of formal and informal learning have been shown to be different and it is the combination of both of these experiences which is the most powerful. Cole and Scribner (1973) showed that formal education helps students to develop abstract thought based on general, universal principles. However, the development of meaning from those abstract principles learned in school is highly dependent on having a diverse range of out-of-school experiences.

Engagement with cultural opportunities and out-of-school activities is even more important for young people from low SES families. Research shows that differences in experiences over the summer period can attribute to around two-thirds of the difference in learning between low and high SES students during the school year (Alexander et al., 2007; Downey et al., 2004).

In addition, Adamson and Poultney (2010) sought to explore and summarise the evidence base relating to young people's involvement in 'positive activities'. In this study, 'positive activities' were defined as 'participation in structured leisure-time activities outside of school and home'. Such activities were varied but predominantly sports-based with arts and/or

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<sup>2</sup> Living in poverty defined as dependent children (under 16 years or in full-time education) living in a family receiving less than 60 per cent of the median income after housing costs (relative poverty).

cultural activities far less prevalent. They found that around three-quarters of young people participated in some form of positive activity but far fewer young people from lower income families or from rural areas did so. This is concerning since a range of positive outcomes were reported to be delivered through young people's participation in positive activities including developing personal, social and emotional skills, improved relationships between young people and their peers and adults and improved educational outcomes. The more positive activities young people engaged in, the greater their perceived benefit. However, it was recognised that there was a lack of robust evidence in terms of social return on investment and on longitudinal outcomes and that much of the evidence was based on young people's self-reports.

### **The lifestyles of young people from low SES families**

There are lots of statistics available on poverty in the UK, and worldwide, about the risk factors for experiencing poverty. There is also a large body of evidence of the negative outcomes associated with low SES, such as anti-social behaviour, violence, crime, unemployment and physical and mental health issues.

Literature has also often concerned what young people with low SES are *excluded* from and the activities they are *unable* to participate in. But, there appears to be much less research providing a picture of what daily life is actually like for young people living in poverty (Ridge, 2009; Green, 2007) and the types of activities in which they *do* participate. For this project we are more concerned with the literature about engaging with positive activities<sup>3</sup> and therefore have focused our review on those pieces of literature which provide an understanding of this, what barriers they face to engaging with positive activities and how these can be overcome.

### **Young people from low SES families engaging in activities and informal learning opportunities**

The Taking Part Survey measures engagement and non-engagement in culture, leisure and sport in England. It is the key evidence source for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), providing reliable national estimates of participation and supporting the Department's aim of improving the quality of life for everyone by providing people with the chance to get involved in a variety of these opportunities.

This survey shows the strong relationship between cultural engagement and deprivation (Taking Part Survey, 2010). People who live in the lowest SES areas of England are significantly less likely than people in the highest SES areas to visit museums and galleries, heritage sites and public libraries; they are also less likely to engage in the arts. In many cases, the differences between these two groups is considerable, for example, people in the highest SES areas (84 per cent) are more than twice as likely to visit a heritage site than those in the lowest SES areas (40 per cent). Interestingly, the relationship between sports participation and deprivation was not shown to be statistically significant.

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<sup>3</sup> Positive activities were defined as participation in structured leisure-time activities outside of school and home.

Young people from ethnic minorities also appear to be less likely to engage with cultural offerings (e.g. Falk and Dierking, 2000) and these young people face additional barriers to engagement. Sandell (2004) argues that museums (cultural offerings) have played a role in disempowering and oppressing minority communities and that this indicates why these communities are under-represented as museum visitors.

Sandell cites an influential study initiated by the Museums and Galleries Commission in 1998, which found that museums and galleries were seen by some ethnic communities as 'white people's territory'. Feelings of exclusion dominated, driven by a lack of relevant exhibits, and by images and histories of ethnic minorities which were seen as negative and offensive (Desai and Thomas, 1998, cited by Sandell, 2004). Some organisations are working hard to address these issues by engaging with minority audiences and developing exhibitions which are led by their interests. However, Sandell argues that these programmes generally offer just short-term success due to lack of wholesale transformation or practices not being embedded throughout the organisations.

## **Barriers to engaging in activities for low SES young people**

### **Theoretical Perspective**

The barriers to engagement are in part financial, but a number of other factors also play a significant role. Young people living within areas of socio-economic disadvantage are influenced by, and have influence on, other individuals and organisations within their communities.

Bronfenbrenner's ecosystemic theory of human development is a useful way of considering the wider context in which children grow up. Bronfenbrenner (1989) described the ecology of human development as:

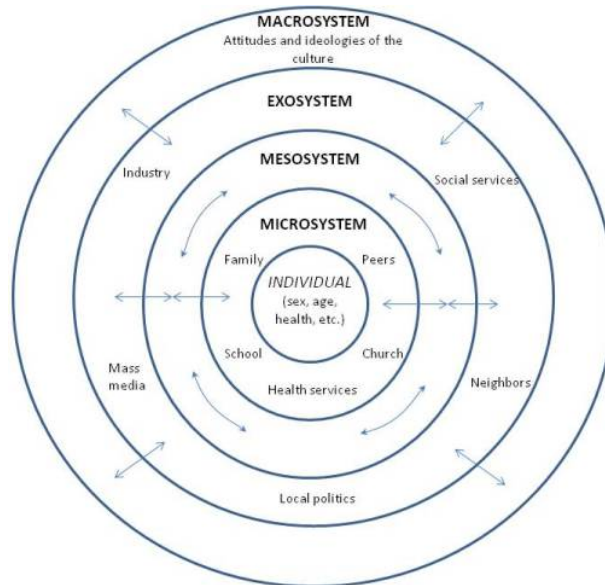
*"The scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the lifecourse, between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded."*

Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's approach, young people can be seen as surrounded by a range of influences or settings that they both influence and which influence them (see figure, below).

- The influencers or settings within the **microsystem** include parents, school, church and friends. Young people interact directly with these influences within their immediate vicinity through face-to-face activities and interpersonal relations.
- Within the next layer, the **mesosystem**, linkages and processes exist between two or more influences which also impact on the developing young person. Examples of these linkages and processes include the relationships between teachers and parents or between the local community safety team and parents.
- The **exosystem** describes the wider social context in which young people grow up. Again the exosystem affects the settings and therefore influences young people as they grow up. Examples here include parents' workplace culture, which will impact indirectly on children and young people.

- Surrounding the young person and the other three systems is the **macrosystem**, which includes overarching beliefs, values and culture, passed on from one generation to the next through processes of socialisation.
- Finally, the **chronosystem** recognises events that impact on the other systems, and ultimately the individual, over time, such as divorce or economic downturn.

Bronfenbrenner's theory is relevant to this study because it highlights the complexity of young people's development and that the experiences of young people living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage will vary considerably from those living in more affluent areas.



Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework for human development. Note that there is an additional layer not shown here, the chronosystem, which reflects the dimension of time and the events that occur throughout a person's life. *Hchokr/Wikipedia*

### **Micro- and Meso-systems – Family, School, Peers and Neighbourhood**

Morrow (2006) examined the participation of young people from socio-economically disadvantaged communities exploring the nature of social networks, local identity, attitudes towards institutions and facilities in the community.

*“Overall, the study highlighted how a range of practical, environmental, and economic constraints were felt by this age-group; for example, not having safe spaces where they could play, not being able to cross the road because of traffic, having no place to go except the shopping centre, being regarded with suspicion because of lack of money.”*

(Morrow, 2006:145)

Other research indicates that children and young people living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage have less freedom than their wealthier peers. For example a third of children in homes with an annual income under £15,000 thought that parents did not give their children enough freedom, compared with a fifth of young people in homes with an annual income of £50,000 or more (the Young People's Social Attitudes Survey of 663 12 to 19-year-olds, National Centre for Social Research, Park et al., 2004).

Young people in less affluent households were also shown to have greater domestic responsibilities. Morrow (1994) found that 40 per cent of 11 to 16-year-olds had regular home responsibilities (minding siblings, cleaning, laundry etc.) and almost as many helped in a family business or earned money outside the home. Some European children (usually unpaid) are the main carers of disabled parents or other family members (Becker, Dearden and Aldridge, 2001).

There is a wide body of evidence demonstrating the importance of parental support and engagement on children's educational outcomes (McCoy and Cole, 2011; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Harris and Goodall, 2008). The issues are not necessarily that low SES parents do not want to engage in their children's education, but that they often do not possess the necessary skills and level of education themselves to be able to actively support them.

However, children's outcomes are not just dependent on their socio-economic status. What parents do with their children can have a profound effect on their educational achievement. The Effective Provision of Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE 3–16) study has followed the progress of over 3,000 children aged 3 to 16 years since 1997 using a longitudinal, mixed-methods design. This study has highlighted some key features of young people 'succeeding against the odds' (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2011; Melhuish et al., 2001).

The parents of children who were 'succeeding against the odds' used a range of 'active cultivation' parenting techniques which provided a wide range of learning experiences. These experiences included opportunities to learn in the home such as reading together, talking about school and in-home activities such as cooking together. These parents also saw value in activities and experiences outside of school and they worked hard to overcome financial barriers to taking part in day trips such as visits to the museum, theatre and historical sites and also taking family holidays. Importantly, these parents recognised the educational value of these activities and that they offered learning about history, other cultures and languages.

By contrast, children who were not succeeding 'against the odds' were less likely to be engaging in such activities and, importantly, any activities that they did engage in were usually thought of as 'fun' and 'relaxing', rather than educational.

Parental environment has also been shown to have an impact on language development, which is in turn then linked to educational outcomes. Roulstone et al. (2011) showed that the communication environment in which a child is raised is more important than SES in determining language development at two and four years old. Language is also important in the context of cultural offerings, as it can act as a barrier to involvement:

*"When working with children and young people, using language that is rooted in their landscape is vitally important, otherwise we risk creating barriers to their access. Historically language has been used to exclude or create inequality."*

(Cairns, 2013, p. 4)

Research has also highlighted the role of parents in young people's attitudes to science. George and Kaplan (1998) found that the more positive the parent's attitudes to science, the

better pupils actually achieve in science, through a combination of discussing school experiences and supporting them through activities such as visits to the library and museums.

In their analysis of engagement with the arts, Oskala et al. (2009) suggested several possible reasons why parental encouragement may have a strong impact on engagement in the arts as an adult:

- Removing the fear – engagement with the arts as a child provides a level of familiarity with the experience, removing the barriers associated with a lack of understanding the ‘rules of engagement’, such as how to get involved, what happens, how to dress and behave, etc.
- Making the link – exposure to the arts as a child can serve to normalise arts activities, breaking down elitist barriers and making them feel an appropriate, even attractive use of spare time; ‘for people like me’.
- Generating confidence and motivation – being taken to concerts, museums and galleries as a child allows them to develop a level of familiarity, understanding and cognitive confidence which may result in enhanced enjoyment of arts experiences, and therefore make it more likely for them to choose arts experiences as an adult.

Another barrier faced by young people living in less affluent households is their exclusion from opportunities made possible by digital media. Some studies suggest that there is considerable variation between young people’s opportunity to access the internet. The UK Children Go Online study of 9 to 19-year-olds’ use of the internet concluded that socio-economic differences are sizeable (Livingstone et al., 2005).

In 2007, Livingstone and Helsper found that whilst very few young people do not have access to the internet at all, there is a clear differentiation in the quality of internet access between low and high SES young people. Daily users are more likely to come from middle-class homes and also benefit from

better quality internet access, using it for school work, seeking information, email, instant messaging, games, downloading music and looking for cinema/theatre/concerts. These young people are therefore more likely to have a greater awareness of current activities and events taking place in their local area.

### **Exosystem – Economic, Political and Education systems**

Around 1.36 million young people aged between 16 and 24 years are not engaging in any form of education, employment or training (NEET). Despite a small fall in 2012, this still represents a quarter of all young people in the job market in England. Almost one in five economically active 18 to 24-year-olds were unemployed in October 2012, whereas 6.3 per cent of 25 to 49-year-olds are unemployed. Beneath these headlines, around 260,000 young people have been out of work for over a year, doubling since 2008, and 100,000 for two years (Local Government Association, 2013) – long-term youth unemployment is a major challenge.

Aspirations may also be affected by differences in SES. Park et al. (2004), found that household income affected the proportions of children and young people saying that their

main ambition in life was 'to be happy' and 'to have a good job'. Nearly two-thirds of those living in the highest income quartile said their main ambition was to be happy, compared to just 43 per cent of those in the lowest income quartile. Conversely, a larger proportion of those in the lowest income quartile than in the highest quartile said that having a good job was their main ambition (13 and 3 per cent respectively). This variation in aspiration may be understandable in the current economic climate.

## **Engaging children and young people from disadvantaged communities**

There are of course many parties who have a concern with increasing engagement with young people who have become less engaged with their communities and with their learning. Whilst there may be a paucity of evidence about how these young people can be re-engaged with science, there are perhaps lessons that can be learnt from other work that has attempted to engage young people from disadvantaged communities in education and other activities including sport, active citizenship, museums and the arts.

Examples of work that has focused on increasing engagement with young people from disadvantaged communities follow.

### **Education**

In considering ways in which young people can be re-engaged in educational opportunities it is important to ensure that young people's own views are sought in order to ensure that the complexity of young people's lives is recognised. This is exemplified by the work of Quinn et al. (2008).

In their paper 'Dead end kids in dead end jobs?' Quinn et al. (2008) challenge the notion that young people in 'jobs without training' would necessarily benefit from being encouraged into alternative educational pathways. Their assertions are based on a longitudinal, participative, qualitative project involving 182 interviews with 114 young people in jobs without training.

The study attempted to challenge existing notions and respond to the lack of research that examined the complexity of these young people's needs, work experiences and priorities. They concluded that whilst young people in jobs without training face serious structural inequalities, the term does not reflect their complex lives or the fact that these young people do experience learning in the workplace and in their worlds outside. These contexts might be preferable to those offered by school or college and Quinn et al. therefore suggest trying to force these young people into formal educational pathways is likely to be resisted.

It is important, therefore, to not only give young people a voice, but to also ensure it results in the outcomes they desire. Micha de Winter (1997) summarised this position stating:

*"It is not sufficient to just provide structures for children to engage in decision-making if they do not bring about a change in their ability to participate as equal citizens within the context of the community."*

### **Sport**

StreetGames is a national sports charity that was launched in 2007 to achieve their vision: 'For the most disadvantaged young people and communities to enjoy the benefits of sport and participate at the same rate as their more affluent peers'. It is dedicated to developing sport within disadvantaged communities and making sport accessible to young people

regardless of their social and economic circumstances. Its network has expanded year-on-year since its inception and there are now over 250 projects taking place across the UK which have attracted over 230,000 participants, generated over 2.4 million attendances and engaged over 7,000 young volunteers. The programme is underpinned by the following values:

- Empowerment – StreetGames helps people to become the best they can be through taking part in and leading sport initiatives.
- Partnerships – StreetGames values partnerships which draw on each other's strengths and expertise and share good practice.
- Creativity – Doorstep Sport is an emerging style of community engagement and sports delivery bringing a creative and flexible eye to new situations and challenges.
- Equity – challenging the barriers which prevent so many women and girls, black and minority ethnic communities and disabled people who live in disadvantaged areas from taking part in sport.

StreetGames promotes Doorstep Sport as an effective way to reach out to and engage disadvantaged young people – this is sport delivered within disadvantaged communities 'in the right place, in the right style, at the right price and at the right time'. Identifying what the 'right' factors are for young people is challenging since there will be variation between groups. In a briefing paper about Doorstep Sport, StreetGames states:

*“Development officers, coaches and project co-ordinators need to find out what's 'right' by asking and testing, and it's an evolving feature that will change by group and by coach.”*



The briefing paper offers some guidance on issues that are relevant to the four key areas:



The briefing paper highlights the importance of the coach in ensuring the success of Doorstep Sport. The coach needs to be fully in charge of the sessions; however the best examples are where they are not 'visibly' in charge. The paper specifically states that coaches must be able to:

- Creatively develop sessions that build on the mood and interests of the group
- Build trust
- Act as a role-model, mentor and motivator
- Be non-judgemental, positive and welcoming
- Signpost
- Adapt sessions for inferior facilities

In addition the paper states that the internal life of the group is also important and needs to be paid attention to by the coach. There are two elements that are suggested as being relevant to developing the internal life of the group:

- Making sure every session is well managed and interesting

- Planning a series of sessions to give shape and rhythm to the programme

Ways in which these elements can be delivered were also suggested. These included:

- Rewards and incentives for regular attendance
- Having events to plan and look forward to, necessitating working as a group
- Ensuring young people have time to socialise
- Gaining feedback from young people
- Setting personal goals
- Links with other clubs with clear pathways in place

Whilst not specifically focused on young people from low SES families, Allender et al. (2006) conducted a review of qualitative research looking at the reasons for participation and non-participation in sport amongst children, young people and adults. Fun, enjoyment, social interaction and support for self-identity were most commonly cited as reasons for participation or non-participation in sport and it could be surmised that these factors may play an important role in continued participation in a whole range of cultural activities.

For younger children, experimentation with a variety of different activities was found to be key, as this encouraged greater enjoyment of the activities. By contrast, introducing a competitive element decreased enjoyment for younger children, therefore it may be possible that these elements may work in a similar way for other cultural activities.

Parents also played a key part in encouraging and facilitating sports activities for younger children, therefore encouraging sustained engagement. Parental support for their children's activities was greater if the activities were easy to access, provided a safe environment in which to play, had good 'drop off' arrangements and offered activities for other family members to take part in at the same time. Parental support and encouragement was found to be especially important during life transitions, for example moving from primary to secondary school, where it was vital to maintaining participation.

For teens and young women, self-image (i.e. concerns about body shape and weight management) played an important part in encouraging them to take part in sport. Developing social networks and support from family and peers were also important factors. By contrast, negative experiences at school, negative peer pressure, identity conflicts, the dominance of boys, a competitive environment and lack of teacher support were found to be barriers to taking part in sport for teens and young women.

It may be possible to extrapolate these findings to engaging with informal learning opportunities.

### **Active citizenship**

EngagED was a collaborative project between the University of Cambridge, University of Leicester and Community Service Volunteers (CSV) and supported by the Society of Educational Studies. The two-year project researched the citizenship action and voice of

young people in the UK focusing on the experiences of young people living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

The findings led the team to propose five fundamentals of good practice for those working with young people from socially disadvantaged communities. Despite this research being focused specifically on civic engagement it would seem likely that this good practice is relevant to engaging young people from these communities in other positive activities.

**Thinking differently** encourages a move away from adult-initiated activities that offer little opportunity for young people to influence and lead those activities. Young people have unique perspectives about what matters to them and what opportunities for learning they would like within their communities. Where possible the activities should recognise young people's existing skills rather than focusing on a deficit model which emphasises where young people's skills may be lacking.

**Listening harder** refers to creating opportunities for young people's voices to be heard so that they can share their ideas and views. The methods employed to hear young people's voices should allow a range of voices to be heard and not just those voices from young people who are articulate and confident enough to share their views. Young people need to see that their ideas have had influence in order to ensure that their involvement is not perceived to be tokenistic.

**Broadening opportunities** recognises that young people who have become disengaged are unlikely to be motivated to re-engage if they do not perceive what they are being offered to be different to what was on offer before.

**Making it possible** is concerned with addressing the specific barriers to engagement that young people in disadvantaged communities face, such as a lack of resources, lack of role-models and lack of visible and appropriate opportunities to become engaged. It also recognises that some young people may simply be unaware of what opportunities are available for them to engage in.

**Rewarding experiences** implies that young people are unlikely to engage in experiences that they do not perceive to be worthwhile and rewarding for them in some way. If the benefits of participation are obscure young people are unlikely to be keen to engage in opportunities.

Also of relevance to this study are four key issues identified by Brodie et al. (2010), which underpinned the project 'Pathways through Participation: What creates and sustains active citizenship?'. The Pathways through Participation project sought to explore how and why individuals get involved and stay involved in different forms of participation. It aimed to increase knowledge of people's pathways into and through participation, and of the factors that shape their participation over time; this project identified four:

- **People first** – participation as experiential / putting individuals at the forefront, rather than using the organisation as the starting point
- **Context is all important** – it is not enough to just look at the individual; also need to look at the impact of space and place and the flows through and across these and how individuals navigate these

- **Relationships matter** – between activities, between individual life experiences and activities, between people, and between people and the state
- **Pertinence of power** – inequality/equality of access and of opportunity, inclusion/exclusion of participatory activities and of participatory factors

### Arts engagement

Another example of effective engagement with young people from disadvantaged communities is provided in a report by Sheikh (2013); Evaluation of CCE (Centre for Commonwealth Education)/ National Children's Bureau (NCB) Arts and Cultural Activities Project with Looked After Children.

The evaluation examined the impact and effectiveness of the various arts and cultural activities across three sites for the looked after children that participated. The aims for the projects were to:

- Increase self-efficacy and empowerment
- Increase confidence and self-esteem
- Strengthen relationships with carers, social workers, siblings and other looked after children
- Develop new creative, life and social skills (e.g. leadership, communication and teamwork)
- Increase regular participation in arts opportunities

The evaluation evidence indicated that the arts and cultural activities did have a positive impact on the children. The project was particularly successful in improving the self-efficacy and empowerment of many of the children involved. An increase in confidence and self-esteem of many of the children was also demonstrated but some continued to demonstrate low self-efficacy, belief and confidence across the three sites. The evaluation report offers learning relevant to the engagement of the children in the project. The success factors identified for the project were:

- A safe space created by a skilled team of artists
- Involvement of foster carers and siblings
- Positive arts opportunities that allowed the children to have fun, learn new skills and showcase their achievements
- Consideration given to the size and composition of the group with a mixed age range proving successful at one project as it allowed older young people to support younger children
- Focus on looked after children and their families which meant that activities could be tailored to their needs

- Varied and multiple activities for children to engage in to suit their personal preferences.

### **Diversity and equality in museum visiting**

Sandell's 2004 paper highlights some interesting ways in which museums are trying to address the issues of diversity and equality in their visitor profiles and in their exhibitions, which fall into a number of key themes:

- **Culturally specific programming** – developing exhibitions and events using collections which are thought to hold particular significance for certain communities have resulted in attracting more representative audiences
- **Collaboration with communities** – involving the local community in the consultation process, collection of artefacts and design and interpretation of exhibitions to ensure they are inclusive, relevant and reflect contemporary views
- **Addressing diversity in the museum workforce** – schemes to enable ethnic minorities to compete at an even level for jobs in the sector, via traineeships and bursaries
- **Sensitive representation of social diversity** – ensuring exhibitions do not under- or mis-represent ethnic communities by consulting with them on the meaning and communication of exhibitions and artefacts, including contemporary exhibits and interpretation from representatives from their communities
- **Challenging prejudice and discrimination** – designing exhibitions that actively challenge preconceptions, prejudices and racial discrimination, encouraging visitors to make connections with their own lives, debate issues and think more deeply about contentious issues
- **Equality in displays** – giving equal positioning of objects and collections from different cultural segments and providing integrated, thematic interpretations of the displays

These are useful examples of how cultural offerings can work harder to address issues of diversity and equality which should, in turn, lead to a more inclusive visitor profile.

However, Sandell also identifies a number of challenges that cultural organisations continue to face in order to truly embed these principles in their policies and practice: conservatism and inertia within organisations meaning attempts at equality are short-lived, lack of consensus in the sector on the roles and responsibilities of museums, lack of strong leadership for cultural change and a tendency towards a 'neutral' stance rather than showing a positive commitment to equality. In order for cultural offerings to make a real and long-term change these challenges need to be tackled.

### **Museum visiting**

Interestingly, a new way of thinking about museum visitors, their experiences and how to engage them has emerged more recently, described by Falk in his 2010 paper 'The museum visitor experience; Who visits, why and to what effect?' Whilst the Falk paper does not

specifically give examples of what has worked to engage people in visiting museums, nor does it specifically look at young people or those from low SES families, his proposition of a new model of thinking about visitor experiences is extremely interesting and may have implications for the next stage of research.

Falk identifies two key problems with much of the historical research describing the visitor experience:

- The majority of museum research has historically taken place inside the museum itself, however only a small fraction of an individual's experience of visiting a museum actually occurs within the museum. The decision to go to a museum and much of the cognitive processing of the experience happens outside of the museum setting. Furthermore, it has been shown that the visitor experience is also influenced by their prior experiences, knowledge, interest and relationships with others as this shapes what they actually do and think about whilst in the museum.
- Most research also just focuses on fixed characteristics of the visitor, e.g. their demographics, or the museum, e.g. the type of exhibits. Whilst this can provide interesting facts about who is or isn't visiting particular museums or exhibits, it does not reveal much about what actually drives a person to visit (or not).

Falk argues that these traditional means of describing and evaluating the experiences of visitors to museums do not provide a meaningful or effective way of understanding *why* people visit a museum, and therefore provide very limited insights on which to base, develop or improve the services offered.

Instead, Falk argues that museum visits are extremely personal experiences which are framed and shaped by an individual's sense of identity and their original motivations for visiting. He found that most visitors have a pre-determined reason for visiting and that what an individual experiences during their visit and what they remember of it afterwards are directly related to those reasons for going in the first place. Falk believes that "these entering motivations appear to be self-reinforcing, directing visitors' learning, behaviour and perceptions of satisfaction" (p. 4).

Falk has identified a number of motivational categories for visiting museums that "could best be understood as designed to satisfy one or more personal identity-related need" (p. 4). Falk argues that these identity-related needs, combined with an individual's understanding of what a museum visit is like, how it 'works' and why you would go there (i.e. what the museum experience 'affords') create a very strong feedback loop which reinforces their behaviour and encourages the seeking out of other museums in the future.

Interestingly, Falk has found that visitors tend to fall into just one of a small number of identity-related categories:

- **Explorers:** curiosity-driven visitors who are looking for interesting, attention grabbing experiences to increase their learning. These visitors are very personally focused, concentrating on what they want to see irrespective of who they have visited with.
- **Facilitators:** visitors whose motivations are mainly to enable the experiences and learning of others, for example, parents taking their children. These visitors are just

concerned about what their significant others are experiencing and not about their own interests.

- **Professional/Hobbyists:** these visitors enter to seek out specific content which links closely to either professional interests or hobbies.
- **Experience seekers:** visitors looking to 'tick the box' of important places to see. Fun is an important aspect for these visitors.
- **Rechargers:** visitors looking for spiritual, restorative or inspiring experiences.
- **Affinity seekers:** visitors seeking experiences that appeal to their sense of identity as a person or with their heritage.
- **Respectful pilgrims:** duty or obligation-driven visitors who see their visit as a way to honour the memory of those represented.

Falk argues this new way of classifying visitors could have huge benefits for deliverers of museum services, by helping them to better satisfy the needs of visitors, both regular and occasional. This approach could also be beneficial for developing ideas for attracting those segments who currently do not visit cultural offerings. Falk suggests that what separates those who do visit from those who don't is not the identity-related need as these apply equally to both groups. Instead, it is the perception of museums as places which can fulfil these needs which is missing in non-visitors.

Whilst this paper does not have specific examples of how to engage with visitors, this is an interesting theory. It suggests that cultural offerings and visitor research could greatly benefit from re-focusing on understanding visitor needs; identifying how to improve perceptions of museums as places that can fulfil these needs; and how to deliver experiences which meet these needs.

## Conclusions

It is clear there are a number of overarching themes in these examples of what has worked to engage young people from low SES families:

- **Collaboration** – a common theme in these examples is the importance of involving young people in the planning, design and execution of activities, ensuring they are young person-centred and not adult or organisation-centred. Collaborating in this way means that activities are developed with the skills and needs of young people at their heart and so are much better placed to foster sustained engagement
- **Variety** – variety in the activities available helps to sustain interest and allows for young people to choose what appeals to them
- **Planning** – successful activities are also well planned and well managed, with careful consideration given to group composition, leadership, goals and links with other organisations
- **Practicalities** – activities need to be accessible and held in a safe environment as well as recognise and overcome common barriers to engagement such as lack of resources, the role of parents, lack of role-models etc.
- **Showcase achievements** – reward achievements and provide opportunities for young people to share and be proud of their accomplishments



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