**Can arts-based education help re-engage excluded learners?**: **A case study of an arts-based programme aimed at enhancing educational engagement**

Claire Kinsella 1, Linda K. Kaye 1 & Dave Putwain 2

1 Department of Psychology, Edge Hill University, UK

2 Faculty of Education, Edge Hill University, UK

**Summary**

Although there are concerns about the number of students who prematurely leave mainstream education, research has shown that these students do not always experience disconnection during their learning encounters. Instead, certain conditions have been found to promote engagement in learning and can enhance attendance, retention, and performance (Sinclair et al., 2003). Consequently, this chapter discusses an innovation which focuses upon enhancing learning conditions by offering learners who had been excluded from mainstream school an alternative curriculum experience through the medium of visual art. This chapter considers the context of alternative schooling in the UK for pupils who have been excluded from mainstream schools and how psychology perspectives can inform the development of curriculum innovations in this context.

**Keywords:** Engagement; motivation; arts-based intervention; education

**Current Issues in Alternative Provision in the UK**

The number of students, who prematurely leave mainstream schools in the UK, has become a cause for concern in recent years. Social scientists typically theorise these events as the culmination of a gradual process of student disengagement and alienation, marked by chronic cycles of absenteeism; depressed levels of academic performance as well as highly disrupted patterns of schooling either through incurred suspensions or repeated movement between schools (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, & Shernoff, 2003). With the increased political pressures to reduce exclusion rates, as well as policy demands to meet attainment and attendance targets; many schools have begun to seek alternative solutions to the challenging behaviour and circumstances of some of their most vulnerable pupils (Eastman, 2011). However, as Charlton, Panting and Willis (2004) point out, it is only recently that schools have been able to become more imaginative in their attempts to improve provisions for pupils’ in order to reduce exclusion risks. This is because the government has responded to concerns over the relevance over the National Curriculum by encouraging schools to offer more choices in Key Stage 4 programme of study and by empowering them to devise alternative curriculum options that are better tailored to meet individual needs (For further details see Hallam et al, 2007).

Despite the proliferation of initiatives designed to enhance educational engagement (see Cullen, Fletcher-Campbell, Bowen, Osgood & Kelleher, 2000), Thomson and Russell (2009) have found that the field of alternative education is currently characterized by a lack of co-ordinated data about which programmes exist as well as a proliferation of programmes with varying funding sources, costs and entry practices. The authors suggest that this data deficit has arisen from the unregulated nature of alternative provision, and from the devolved nature of schools and programmes. Of course, this situation bodes very poorly for the monitoring of programme effectiveness, thus the authors have suggested that evidence about quality assurance be harmonized across all alternative programmes so that the outcomes of different interventions can be documented for the future development of professional practice.

Whilst policy-makers and educational practitioners are beginning to act on the perceived irrelevance of the National Curriculum for certain groups of pupils, there are a number of critics who are considerably more sceptical of the assumption that if the curriculum can be made more relevant to the job market, then disaffection amongst pupils will be more unlikely. For example, Solomon and Rogers (2001) argue for the development of carefully sequenced programmes which contain a number of more proximal academic goals as opposed to those which emphasise more distal, vocationally-orientated goals. Beyond this, Thompson and Russell (2009) argue that vocational education strategies may not meet the diverse needs and interests of pupils. In addition, they point out that while the devolved and unregulated nature of alternative provisions can create a relatively large volume of alternative programmes, the dominant trend is towards the fostering of work-related and basic life skills rather than programmes which adopt a more academic, therapeutic or recreational approach to educational engagement.

In terms of documenting the specific role of the arts in enhancing educational engagement in alternative educational settings, a small number of reports on arts projects have emerged in recent years. For example, Wilkin, Gulliver and Kinder (2005) conducted 69 interviews with pupils, teachers, artists and other stakeholders from seven arts projects which were based at three individual Pupil Referral Unit (PRUs) and four different Learning Support Units (LSUs) across the UK. Most pupils interviewed reported that projects had given them a sense of satisfaction and achievement as well as increasing their knowledge skills and techniques in certain art forms. In addition, approximately half of the pupils felt that participating in the arts had improved their communication and listening skills. Teachers interviewed also noticed an improvement in their pupils’ ability to interact within groups and reported that increased self-esteem and confidence was often evident as a consequence of achievement and participation in projects. Nevertheless, Wilkin and colleagues also found that pupils did not generally consider that their involvement in the arts projects had directly impacted upon their commitment to education nor did they think that it was likely that the positive impact the projects had on their behaviour would be sustained within the day-to-day PRU/LSU environment.

This raises significant questions as regards how arts-based educational interventions are evaluated because an assumption is often made that participation in the arts might have the capacity to engender a more positive perception of schooling and impact upon young people’s behaviour in the classroom. However, as the evidence on alternative educational programmes considered thus far has demonstrated; most evaluations do not present a wide range of evidence arising from a variety of data sources including randomized controlled trials or analyses based upon of pre-and post- test measures. Rather they tend to rely solely upon the content of key stakeholders’ memories of events as well as their current perceptions of schooling. Whilst the documentation of such memories and perceptions holds considerable value in evaluating educational initiatives, however, such evaluations might be considerably bolstered should a wider range of different types of data become available since these might allow researchers to track changes in participants’ perceptions and behaviours *as* they arise during activities as well as allowing researchers to more effectively make comparisons between the outcomes of different programmes. Consequently, it is with these limitations in mind that the current innovation has been considered and devised.

***The psychology of pupil engagement***

Despite the increasing interest amongst psychologists in the concept educational engagement; when the literature comprising this field is considered as a whole, it becomes clear that it has not yet crystallised into an easily definable set of competing theoretical perspectives. Nevertheless, throughout this varied assemblage of writings based upon a wide array of findings from basic, correlational research, lab-based experiments and real-world interventions; it is possible to discern between three core, emerging perspectives in the psychology of engagement; these are the Participant-Identification model (Finn, 1989), self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 1997).

Finn’s (1989) participation-Identification model was one of the first psychological models to explicitly elaborate a number of key variables underlying educational engagement. According to this model, dropping out of school is not an isolated event; rather it is the manifestation of much longer-term processes of disengagement from school. Therefore, it is argued that how pupils spend their time is important for fostering an interest in school. Within this view, then, the concept of educational engagement is focused upon the interaction between *student behaviour* (in the form of participation in school-related activities such as attending classes, paying attention, following classroom rules, completing assignments, taking initiative and participating in extra-curricular activities) and *student affect* (e.g., feelings of belonging and valuing school). It is argued that although behavioural engagement is often viewed as the primary driver of student performance, emotion is likely to act as the fuel for the actions and thought processes that lead to high-quality learning (Skinner, Furrer, Marchand, & Kindermann, 2008). Thus, the participation-identification model holds that the likelihood of school completion is maximised when students maintain multiple and expanding forms of participation in school-relevant activities and that failure to participate in such activities may have negative effects on school related outcomes. Empirical support for this model is provided by a number of research studies, particularly in relation to activity participation and educational attainment (Cooper et al., 1999; Dotterer, McHale & Crouter, 2007; Mahoney et al., 2003) and in the evaluation of educational interventions (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair & Lehr, 2004; Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Smithrim & Upitis, 2005).

The participation-identification model, however, has been criticised by Dei and colleagues (1997) for failing to adequately specify the psychological processes which lead to students becoming disengaged. To add to this critique, it is argued here that Finn’s model could be accused of failing to account for those students who for various reasons of their own, consciously and actively resist partaking in extra-curricular activities and in-school interventions. In addition, according to Dei, Finn’s model also fails to account for those students who continue to identify with the school system, but due to the manner in which the external, structural conditions of this system are met with, have become marginalized from mainstream education.

In order to develop a deeper understanding of this process of gradual disengagement from school, other psychologists have attended more closely to the intrapersonal dynamics which underlie specific patterns of engagement. The most prominent theory influencing researchers interested in these dynamics is that of self-determination theory (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2002). The basic tenets of this theory are rooted in organismic assumptions about intrinsic motivation which proposes that people are innately curious, possess a natural love of learning and desire to internalize the knowledge, customs and values around them (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). The core idea is that humans come with basic needs, and when these needs are met by social contexts or activities, people will engage constructively with them. However, when these needs are thwarted, people become disaffected and may withdraw, escape or resist participating. The most prominent model of educational engagement with draws upon the basic tenets of this theory is a self-system model of motivational development. This model posits three fundamental psychological needs which are based in physiology and are evolutionary adaptive: the needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Whilst relatedness refers to the need to experience oneself as connected to other people, competence refers to the need to experience oneself as effective in one’s interactions with the physical and social environment, and autonomy refers to the need to express one’s authentic self and to experience the self as the source of one’s own actions. According to the self-system model, school contexts influence engagement by either supporting or undermining these needs (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). From these experiences, children cumulatively construct views of themselves which in turn, shape their perceptions of school and guide their future actions (Reeve, Ryan, Deci & Jang, 2007; Finn & Zimmer, 2012).

Researchers interested in testing the self-system model of motivational development have tended to study the impact of teacher and parent support on self-system engagement. In particular, findings have indicated its utility in exploring the role of teachers’ relatedness support and parental involvement in fostering greater levels of school engagement (Fall & Roberts, 2011). Moreover, this link was mediated by sense of control and identification with school, in which these energizing internal mechanisms motivated students to be academically and behaviourally engaged in school activities. Research evaluating interventions for educational engagement has also provided empirical support for this model (Hänze & Berger, 2007; Hickman, 2006). In relation to interventions which are specifically arts-based, Hickman’s (2006) case study observed that by involving two young people, who had previously been identified as being disengaged with school, through teaching art to their peers they developed an increased sense of confidence and self-worth as well as being more positively disposed towards learning. The authors concluded that this was due to their development of a greater sense of empathy for the challenges facing their teachers. Therefore, although it was observed that this peer-teaching intervention failed to make any lasting impact on the pupils behaviour once they had returned to classes which adopted a more traditional instructional format, it was nevertheless found that this intervention had succeeding in making positive gains in more general attitudes towards education.

Whilst the participation-identification model and self-system models of motivation conceptualise educational engagement as a relatively enduring predisposition towards school which is the result of an ongoing, dynamic interaction between a person and his or her social and physical environment; both sets of researchers, nevertheless, retain a strong empirical separation between the various emotional, behavioural and cognitive elements underlying the engagement processes. Whilst such conceptual separations may be necessary in order to operationalize and examine rather complex scientific models; other researchers, however, have argued that, in practice, such distinctions may be rather artificial. As a result, other researchers have sought to examine educational engagement *as it emerges* during concrete interactions between a person and his or her educational environment (Hidi, Renninger & Krapp, 2004). This particular focus on the phenomenological aspect of learning, it is argued, more adequately captures the continuous interaction between the various psycho-social processes at play during any educational encounter. Adopting these key principles, but working more directly from the basic tenets of flow theory, Shernoff and colleagues (2003) focused on the phenomenological aspects of high involvement in classrooms whereby educational engagement is conceptualised as a state of deep absorption in an activity and represents a culmination of concentrated attention, intense interest and high enjoyment as opposed to apathy and lack of interest with instruction. Operating from these principles, they developed an ‘experience sampling method’ whereby, in response to a signal from an electronic pager at eight random moments in school time over the course of a week, participants’ reported on their location, activity, affective and cognitive experiences. Analysis of this data revealed that amongst the students sampled, the vast majority of their time was spent in individual learning or passive instruction. In fact, only 14% of their time was spent engaging in interactive learning activities. Nevertheless, students reported higher levels of interest in interactive and individual activities as opposed to passively attending to information in lessons. Interestingly, when Shernoff and colleagues compared levels of engagement by subject, art received the highest composite score. In fact, students reported that although art was not experienced as academically intense, participation in this subject increased their mood and motivation.

Given this, the key practical aim guiding the current innovation was to create a learning context that supports the development of educational engagement amongst a group of young people at risk of becoming disaffected with school. To this end, a variety of challenging and fun learning activities which encouraged young people to discover and follow their own interests and goals, was offered over a period of approximately 7 months to participating pupils

**Methodological approach**

In order to offer the most comprehensive range of information about the dynamics present over the course of the arts-based programme; a single-case study design was chosen as the most suitable methodological framework for the current research. The educational intervention was underpinned by a multi-level research design whereby multiple sources of evidence were employed in order to add breadth and depth to the data. The research design represented below in *Figure 1* aimed to capture the complexity of teaching and learning by incorporating both micro-level and a macro-level data and analytical procedures. Thus, the proposed multi-level analysis allowed the research to focus not only on the individual level units of analysis as they manifest themselves amongst the participants in the proposed arts-based programme; it also permitted a consideration of the wider contextual factors that can be regarded as either enhancing or impeding upon the overall efficacy of the programme as well as its social and ecological validity (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). Within this, an integration of the three main psychological theories of engagement were included to provide a multidimensional account of the learning process.

**Context**: arts-based versus mainstream educational approaches

**Case**: Group participating in arts-based programme

**Embedded Units of Analysis**

SDT

PHEN

PI

Note:SDT =Self-Determination Theory; PI = Participation Identification model; PHEN = Phenomenological perspectives

*Figure 1 – Overview of Case Study research design*

A visual arts educational programme was developed and implemented over the 2013-2014 school year with activities specifically designed in order to tap into the various cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects of engagement as outlined in the previous section. The curriculum for the programme was developed by introducing learners to key pieces of contemporary art and exploring themes around perception them.

The curriculum and activities for the current educational intervention were devised in line with Bartholomew and colleagues’ (1998) intervention mapping framework. Thus, the planning process included a needs assessment in which the researcher collaborated with school management and teaching staff in order to conduct a preliminary assessment of the educational background and primary needs of the participant group as well as to identify the educational resources at the group’s disposal. Following this, a set of programme objectives was specified. Materials which were used during the programme (e.g. lesson plans, student handouts) were developed, and if necessary, revised; in order to ensure that the delivery of the programme was at acceptable levels of completeness and fidelity. In addition, a series of evaluation questions were developed in order to continuously monitor and reflect upon the implementation and delivery of the programme.

***Sampling Strategy***

A group of eight pupils were recruited for participation using a purposive sampling technique. It should be noted that maximising the chances of a positive programme outcome in the context of alternative provision is not as simple as selecting the key demographic characteristics of a population (e.g. age, sex, race, socio-economic status) and recruiting participants purely upon this basis. Rather, the recruitment of participants for the proposed research was primarily based upon an emergent negotiation process between the researcher and various practitioners working with young people in a PRU based in the North West of England. A key consideration, in approaching alternative providers in the region was the particular characteristics of the sub-groups of pupils which have been identified in policy and the academic literature as representing either *unique cases* in the investigation of disengagement and exclusion from school (e.g. girls), *critical cases* in terms of their developmental stage (e.g. pupils aged 11-12) or more *representative cases* in terms of their demographic probability of becoming excluded from school. These include boys, boys of Afro-Caribbean origin, members of the travelling community, pupils eligible for free school meals and pupils with Special Educational needs (for details on pupil Exclusions in England see DfE, 2014).

In order to facilitate the development of trusting and productive working relations with school staff, a series of initial meetings was held to explain the key aims of the research and to consider the practical ways in which these could be achieved. In addition, advice and suggestions were sought on how participants could be invited to take part in the proposed project. The final core participating group was largely reflective of national trends in school exclusion whereby the group consisted of only one female but seven male pupils aged between 11 and 13. All resided in a local town where, according to the DfE school statistics (DfE, 2014), the percentage of children eligible for free school meals is up to twice the national average.

**Implementation of Innovation**

A series of art sessions were delivered on a weekly basis during sessions which last approximately two hours. The content and activities comprising these sessions were developed around a number of themes (for example, 'Climate change', 'The Arctic', 'Underwater worlds', 'Brazil') which aligned with the content of the pupils’ ongoing English and Geography lessons. Within these sessions, a variety of different educational activities took place including; viewing and discussing various pieces of contemporary art, experimenting with various art media and techniques, participating in several interactive games and activities, accompanying staff on a number of nature walks in the local area, visiting the local art gallery to view contemporary pieces of craft and working with a local professional illustrator, to create collages. In order to provide activities that would appeal to the pupils' expressed interest in wildlife, the group also took part in an interactive animal handling session with a specialist education officer at a local zoo where they also embarked upon a photographic exploration of the animals and zoo environment. They also visited a local aquarium and followed this visit with an art project which focused on creating sea creatures using 3-D art materials (See Figure 2 for an example).

 

*Figure 2: Photographic exploration of aquarium and associated arts-based activities*

*Micro-level data analysis*

The first level of analysis brought to the research specifically focuses upon ongoing intra- and interpersonal processes amongst participants taking part in the arts-based educational programme. Various different types of processes were relevant here including the manifest behaviour of the participants, their communicative patterns and subjective views. As a consequence, multiple research methods were employed so as to generate several datasets and will include data obtained by interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, experience sampling forms and photographic data. The intention of this was to conduct the study with multiple lenses and questions in mind in order to compare, lend support to or refute previous findings.

*The Participation-identification Perspective*

To assess and track any changes in the degree to which pupils identified or dis-identified with school, Voelkl’s (1996) *Identification with School Questionnaire* was adapted and a card-sorting version of the original measure was piloted and used with participating pupils at the start of the art programme. The key finding to emerge here was that a strong contrast emerged between the pupils answers on questions which concerned the more abstract realities of school life (i.e. questions which revolved around the significance of school in one's life or conceived of school as a place which had some sort of intrinsic value) when compared to the more concrete realities of school life (i.e. questions which revolved around students' relations with their teachers and peers and the instrumental value of school). Therefore it is with these key themes in mind that the follow-up interviews were conducted. Like the questionnaires, the original interview schedule was adapted in order to develop a format which would more actively encourage pupils to communicate their views in a manner that would be less dependent upon an interview style which assumes that verbal communication is the only way in which a person's experience can be represented

*The Self-determination Perspective*

In addition to the participation-identification model questionnaire research, the extent to which pupils’ psychological needs were being satisfied was assessed through the observation of pupils’ and teachers’ behaviours, talk and gestures during lessons in accordance with the key tenets of self-determination theory. An observation schedule was devised by assessing key literature in the field and this was piloted using pre-existing video footage of lessons which were collected as part of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 1999 *Video Study collection*. A series of art lessons and lessons in other subject areas were observed, audio-recorded and coded by the researcher and an assistant researcher at an additional alternative school in the North-West of England in order to obtain sufficient data to validate this research instrument. Once the final version of the coding schedule was completed, it was used to observe pupils in Art, English and Mathematics lessons over the course of a school week.

In addition, pupils were asked to complete a 36-item questionnaire which assessed the extent to which they felt that the teacher met their needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence. Most questionnaire items are taken from existing empirical research papers in the field. However, since the majority of this research tends to focus on one specific need at a time, it was necessary to develop a more comprehensive questionnaire which drew together questions on all three psychological needs. Thus, the questionnaire was designed and was subject to pilot work and a validation exercise whereby a sample of 250 Year 9 and Year 10 secondary school pupils in the North-West were asked to respond.

*The Flow Perspective*

In order to examine whether students routinely experienced a sense of challenge, interest and enjoyment during the art project and in school more generally, experience sampling forms (ESFs) were used at purposively sampled moments in school. Participating pupils were asked to report on their location, their thoughts, and the primary and secondary activities in which they were engaged as well as to indicate their perceived levels of concentration, interest and enjoyment as activities took place. Compact, user-friendly ESF logbooks were used with brief questions and responses were indicated on simplified 3-point Likert scales in order to minimise task interruptions. Three rounds of ESF data collection were conducted in various subject lessons over the course of a school week.

A number of modifications were made to existing flow instruments in order to facilitate the collection of data from the participating pupils. Firstly, the researcher simplified the questions as much as possible so as to reduce fatigue effects and maximise the likelihood of accurate responding. In order to prioritise what flow concepts to include in this more simplified experience sampling form, Magyaródi and colleagues (2013) exploratory factor analysis of three flow instruments was consulted. Secondly, an observational schedule incorporating researcher ratings of pupils on various flow indicators was adapted from Custodero and colleagues (2007) in order to assessing the extent to which there was divergence in assessing pupils’ flow experiences during the art activities.

*Macro-level data analysis*

The second level of analysis involved a shift of focus to the system of values, ideas and practices that have become attached to certain social groups, institutions and societies that surround the particular group of participants, staff and the researcher as they take part in the proposed arts-based intervention (Thommen & Wettstein, 2007). By considering human developmental processes as a series of inter-changing configurations between people and their environments, the research enters onto a more holistic research terrain (see Brofenbrenner, 1979). Whilst it is clear the theoretical perspectives on engagement have the capacity to attend to the more micro-level features of the context surrounding the participants’ learning encounters; there is little within them that permits an analysis of the more macro-level features of the learners’ context that might have an influence upon their particular patterns of learning and engagement. In order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of participation and engagement as it occurs in these unique settings, it was deemed necessary to examine young people’s learning processes in relation to the social situations in which they occur and by considering any potential interrelations between these social contexts.

To achieve this, extensive field notes were recorded to detail the key events occurring on each school visit as well as the key discussions arising and decisions taken during meetings with school staff. A system was developed whereby quick, short-hand notes were taken immediately upon exiting the field and then more comprehensive and detailed notes were produced over a number of days following the school visit. This proved a particularly time-consuming process, however, the production of the short-hand version of field notes became an invaluable tool to aid recall and made the production of in-depth descriptions of the key events as they unfolded, a more efficient process. In addition, in order to consider the more immediate issues which bore upon the organisation and delivery of art sessions, as well as to document the teaching team’s reflections on previous sessions; a series of seven meetings and post-session discussions with participating school staff were audio-recorded for transcription and subsequent analysis.

**Insights and Recommendations**

The current innovation makes a contribution to the practice of teaching by applying and evaluating a number of key principles derived from psychological theory and research into engagement in learning. This chapter has examined the context of alternative schooling in the UK for pupils who have been excluded from mainstream schools and considered how psychology perspectives can inform the development of curriculum innovations within this context. This chapter concludes outlining recommendations arising from a post-practice reflective analysis of the current innovation.

Firstly, temporality is a key consideration when planning both the delivery and evaluation of an educational programme of this nature. Because the PRU at the centre of the current case study had been conceived as a “short-stay centre” whereby local mainstream school refer their students and engage the services on a fixed, contractual basis; most students were on a “respite programme” which typically lasted 18 weeks. This raises questions regarding the extent to which a curriculum innovation in this context might have the capacity to sufficiently cater to the needs of participating students. Indeed, evidence exists to suggest that pupils may pay an academic cost for high mobility over the course of their school careers (e.g. see Grigg, 2012). In addition, it has been argued that continuous attendance at a school allows pupils to establish relationships and adopt norms that help them learn. A more stable school career may also help teachers more effectively familiarize themselves with and attend to any particular difficulties facing their learners. If such social ties are ruptured, then, presumably these will need to be replenished upon starting at a new school and this process takes time. Indeed, over the course of the current initiative a substantial investment of time was needed in order to build rapport with learners and the institutional staff in order to develop an understanding of student views on curriculum subjects as well as particular staff motivations.

Furthermore, given that many of the students involved in the current innovation had quite disrupted experiences of schooling, the composition and dynamics of the participating group was often unpredictable, which made it very difficult to not only plan and implement art sessions but also to arrange data collection. Issues such as aggressive behaviour, pupil resistance to staff and activities, new enrolments, staff changes and absences dues to sickness, all contributed towards a highly unstable classroom environment, and, at times, this resulted in teachers experiencing difficulty in satisfying session learning objectives. Indeed, with these issues in mind, staff involved in the current innovation emphasised the importance of taking a tentative approach to the co-ordination of the art programme, tailoring the activities involved in each session with respect to the highly volatile group dynamics. When deciding upon the manner in which learner engagement is to be assessed, especially in such changeable circumstances, it is useful to bear in mind that each of the three main educational psychology perspectives in learner engagement presented above, incorporate different assumptions regarding the temporal dimensions of developmental change.

While the participation-identification model focuses on changes in engagement that gradually arise in a cyclical manner over an individual’s life span, the self-determination perspective posits developmental change as a highly dynamic process in which a learner continuously responds to and integrates information on their external environment. The emphasis in flow theory, however, is upon momentary changes in engagement levels with the learner being considered to respond to their environment in a more automatic way. The differences in these temporal emphases have important implications when considering which perspectives will be most suitable given the constraints arising within an educational context; for example, a flow perspective might be more suited to the assessment of educational innovations that aim to introduce a sense of novelty into a learning environment whereas a self-determination might be more suitable for innovations that advance changes in staff-student relations over the longer-term

Beyond this, a further recommendation arising upon reflection on the implementation of the current innovation relates to the methodological approaches of psychological research on young people. The experience of trying to conduct research using existing research tools on engagement confirmed that there is a need for more child-centred approach in areas such as educational psychology which traditionally use instruments which are not entirely suitable or indeed reliable for use with young people. In fact, such was the level of difficulties experienced by the participating pupils - especially in relation to concentration and persistence levels as well as with reading difficulties - that adaptations were made to these existing instruments in order to facilitate the research process. This included an illustrated, flashcard version of Voelkl’s (1996) participation-identification questionnaire which was created and piloted as a card-sorting exercise with a number of Year 9 students in another local alternative school. This indeed generated positive feedback from participating students, therefore, the newly adapted version of the questionnaire was incorporated into the evaluation of the arts-based education programme in place of the original, more conventional paper-based version of the questionnaire.

In addition, when conducting the research interviews, questions on peer and teacher relations, attitudes to school, future plans and reasons for attending school, were embedded in a series of exercises (e.g. genograms depicting significant others' attitudes to school; axioms to elicit the participants' core constructs with respect to their relations with teachers, a ranking task for reasons to go to school etc.) which were inspired by Beaver's (2003) guide on information gathering strategies for professional Educational Psychologists. By involving participants in tasks that were more visual and kinesthetic in nature, a more indirect interview format was adopted which facilitated the kinds of thinking processes necessary in order to formulate more comprehensive responses to the interview questions. Indeed, the success of this strategy may be explained by politeness theory (see Brown & Levinson, 1987) which posits that more indirect forms of communication are less likely to be perceived as imposing and so any threats that might be associated with a formal, audio-recorded research interview may have been mitigated by redirecting attention to more visual and kinaesthetic means of probing pupils’ views. Overall then, it appears that the next steps for research om learner engagement processes in response to educational innovations are to address the different temporal dimensions of engagement and to consider the different ways in which these might be manifested in learner responses by using instruments which are specifically designed to enable younger participants to more effectively contribute to the research process.

In summary, the current innovation highlights an alternative approach which practitioners may adopt in enhancing engagement in selective groups of learners. Reflections from undertaking the current innovation highlight key practical considerations in utilising an approach, and offer insight into the way in which this approach can promote more intrinsic forms of motivation and interest in learning than traditional curricular. In particular, we emphasise the importance of gaining a better understanding of the temporal nature of engagement and how this might be best enhanced through alternative teaching and learning approaches. However, acknowledgement should be made to the fact that the current innovation presented in this chapter was a small-scale initiative in reference to a particularly distinct sample of learners. The effectiveness of such an innovation within other contexts and for different groups of learners may be largely diverse. Therefore, the practical utility of such innovations require further consideration. Despite this, we advocate the strength of the theoretical underpinning of the psychology of learner engagement presented in this chapter, as a key foundation on which future innovations may develop.

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