

Oxford Laidlaw Scholars

“How might extra-curricular activities in State Schools improve educational and social outcomes?”

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Introduction

Given the stark difference in educational outcomes between schools in North and East Oxford, we intend to provide extra-curricular activities to some of the schools with the lowest attainment with the intention that these activities improve the outcomes for the students involved. This intervention will be a pilot project in two local primary schools, to be combined with qualitative and quantitative research, in order to produce a feasibility study for a longer-term intervention and longitudinal study in the area.

Objectives

The need for extra-curricular activities in underperforming state schools in the UK is clear, with many state schools failing to run any extra-curricular activities at all.

As part of the greater Oxford Laidlaw scholar cohort, we are working to reduce the divide between the social and academic outcomes of students in local private/ public schools and state schools by running after-school clubs for state secondary school Oxford Academy and three local primary schools which act as feeder schools to the academy. Our group will consider the research design of the project while simultaneously running debate clubs once a week at two primary schools. By asking questions such as 'What is needed to conduct a longitudinal research project?' and 'What will this intervention look like?' We intend to set up the project for longevity. So that we can ultimately collate our findings with the other Oxford Laidlaw Scholars' groups to produce a comprehensive report that can form the preliminary stages of a longitudinal study to be carried out over a period of multiple years. In this way, our work serves as a feasibility study for a rigorous long-term research project.

Sustainable Development Goals

Through this pilot intervention, we aim to focus on two of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 4 is “Quality Education - Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. SDG 10 is “Reduced

Inequalities – Reduce inequality within and among countries”. By using a targeted pilot intervention of extracurricular provision, in the East Oxford area, we aim to test the feasibility of a longer-term project to pursue these SDGs in the Oxford area. Our pilot intervention and our final report are being produced as part of the Oxford SDG Impact Lab, which aims to continue the project based on our findings.

Rationale

We have opted to focus our extra-curricular pilot intervention on debating as it requires almost no material resources meaning that it can be run in schools with little access to basic stationery and equipment without external contribution. By teaching young children formal styles of debate, we hope to inspire many traits from an early age including increased overall confidence; ability to express oneself clearly; ability to form coherent lines of argument; stronger relationships among peer groups; and greater academic aspiration. The sessions will encourage pupils to use these skills to express and form their own opinions about important issues in their lives.

The sessions that we will carry out shall have the same structure each week to allow the pupils to become accustomed to the sessions quickly. Each session will begin with a short introduction to a new debating skill practiced throughout the session, meaning each week the pupils improve their debating manifestly. This will be followed by a debate between the pupils with the motions also increasing in difficulty as the weeks go on. These sessions will culminate in a final day trip to Oxford University for a more formal debate between the primary schools wherein the pupils will have the opportunity to show their new skills to their parents and carers.

Research Methods

We will be collecting primary data primarily through three methods as part of a mixed-methods study, using both qualitative and quantitative data. Firstly, we will gather observational data when delivering our intervention. This will include the characteristics of the school environment, the level of student engagement. Secondly, interviewing teachers and other key stakeholders within the school will help us to better understand the impact

of the intervention on student performance during class. Furthermore, interviewing the headteachers of the schools will help us understand the broader challenges that the schools are facing. This will allow us to conduct a thematic analysis in order to identify the key social and academic impact areas for primary school students. Thirdly, we'll have the opportunity to interview and survey parents to understand the impact of delivering these activities from a different perspective.

Secondary data resources including census data as well as information about the demographic of the students at the school will be used. The OxWell survey will also provide information about social impact indicators in the area. The OxWell Student Survey is an online survey of school students, designed to measure the wellbeing of young people across the country. In the 2023 edition, over 43,000 students took part across more than 200 schools and colleges. Utilising the study's findings in areas of sense of engagement, extracurricular provision, and fulfilment will help guide our research design and inform the ways we can target our interventions.

This mixed methods approach will allow us to build up a picture of how best to deliver extracurricular activities. Another aspect of our intervention involves strengthening the social skills of students through switching team-members to foster new student friendships. Through introducing debating skills to students, we hope to foster student confidence, and for this to continue through to their academic environment during the school day.

Delivering this extracurricular activity to two different schools in the area allows us to cross-pollinate our experience between them, as well as to build up a picture of the particular challenges facing schools in the East Oxford catchment areas. This also offers the opportunity to foster greater links between the two schools, through the debating showcase at the end of the extracurricular programme.

We will be conducting one session a week at two separate schools; namely John Henry Newman Academy and Rose Hill Primary School. Both cater for children aged 4-11, and our intervention will focus on the older children (9-11). Below is a rough overview of what we will be doing in each session, with the motions in weeks 2-4 being subject to the students' interests and engagement.

To advertise the club, we will create a poster to engage pupils and a short introduction for parents. We have limited the number of sign-ups to 16 pupils with the number of pupils determining the exact structure of the sessions. Below is a preliminary outline of the purpose of each session.

Session:	Description
1) 'Animals ought to be kept in zoos'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☐ Introduce ourselves and what debating is<li>☐ Practice a role-play style of debate
2) TBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☐ Introduce some slightly more difficult topics for debate<li>☐ Introduce formal debating structure
3) TBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☐ Practice rebuttals and responding to new arguments
4) TBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>☐ Formal British Parliamentary style debate session at Oxford University