

Laidlaw Scholars – Extracurricular School Programme

Team Young Detectives
Holly Toombs, Michał Pietrzak, Elizabeth Reid, Yi Lin Zhao.

Title “Political will and policy implications of providing creative, collaborative, problem-solving extracurricular education for school children.”

Aim To gain a deeper understanding of the current political and policy landscape surrounding extracurricular education, and gauge the feasibility of actionable policy change.

To support school children in the collaborative effort of designing a “murder mystery” style game to foster creativity, problem-solving and project management skills.

SDGs Good Health and Wellbeing (3), Quality Education (4)

Objectives

- 1) Collect data to analyse the current political and policy landscape surrounding extracurricular education.
- 2) Create a basis for further research and build a connection with the school/local community.
- 3) Foster Project Management, Collaboration, Creativity, and Problem-Solving within the children we will work with.
- (4. Ensure the children have fun!)

Rationale (provide evidence)

Children in the UK tend to hold high educational aspirations irrespectively of their household's income, meaning it is necessary to acknowledge the imbalance of focus between fostering academic ambition, and enabling crucial skills for their all-round development (Will Baker, Pam Sammons, Iram Siraj-Blatchford, Kathy Sylva, Edward C. Melhuish & Brenda Taggart, 2014). One way of doing this could be through teaching children vital soft skills and enabling personal development to promote positive educational outcomes, which can be done by providing extracurricular activities (Fakhretdinova, Osipov and Dulalaeva, 2021).

Hobbies such as drama and journalism can support the development of unique ideas (Kuhar, K. & Sabljic, J., 2016) whereas sport clubs can help students to strengthen social ties as well as to develop teamwork skills (DÜZ, S. & ASLAN, T. V., 2020). Moreover, certain features of extracurricular activities are particularly beneficial, such as those requiring active, hands-on participation; involving multiple soft skills at once; require collaboration; and are projects spanning a longer period of time than just one session (Fakhretdinova, Osipov and Dulalaeva, 2021). Based on the self-report assessments of undergraduate Engineering students, such activities helped them to develop skills in conflict management, problem solving, communication, negotiation, leadership, critical and independent thinking, creativity and teamwork. Furthermore, in a longitudinal study, Mahoney (2003) found a positive correlation between participation in extracurricular activities in lower secondary schools with higher educational status at age 20. There was also a correlation between extracurricular activity participation and interpersonal competence throughout the study. We can conclude from these studies that extracurricular activities enhance educational attainment and interpersonal skills.

Given the significance of extra-curriculars in a child's development, we note the need to examine the disparity in attendance of extra-curricular clubs between state and independent schools in the UK. Children attending state schools are 20% less likely to participate in extracurriculars involving sports, and 25% less likely to participate in extracurriculars involving arts, music or hobbies (Robinson, 2024). This disparity is caused in part by a failure of schools to provide sufficient opportunities for the children that are affordable, accessible and enjoyable. Thus, it is essential for the policy surrounding their provision to be examined, to determine whether the disparity could be reduced by a change in policy, such as requiring state schools to fund better provision of extra-curricular activities as independent schools already seem to be able to do.

This policy examination will be informed by our own 4-week extra-curricular programme, aimed at building soft skills including leadership, communication and teamwork. Throughout the programme, students will prepare a mystery challenge including a script and clues, and deliver the experience to their peers. This enables students to develop creative skills in a low-pressure environment, where they can implement imaginative and unique suggestions, as they might in a writing club. They will also be able to entertain and engage their peers during the delivery of their mystery experience, which will allow them to grow their confidence with taught improvisation techniques, similarly to the development of creativity in a drama club. The programme will also allow the participants to develop teamwork skills by adopting a similar structure to team sports. The mystery experiences will be developed in teams of 3-6 students where they will need to compromise on strategies. At the end of the programme, teams will be invited to perform their mystery to other groups, developing public speaking skills, and providing the satisfaction of having completed a successful self-directed project over a number of weeks.

We hope that this programme will inform our understanding of the benefits of extra-curricular activities on the happiness and competence of primary school children, and of the practical limitations of running such schemes in schools with limited resources. We will use the opportunity to speak to the teachers of the schools to determine any underlying factors causing the disparity in attendance and/or provision, to contextualise the idealistic aims we may form while comparing existing policies to the extensive opportunities offered by independent schools.

References:

Baker, W., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E.C. and Taggart, B., 2014. Aspirations, education and inequality in England: insights from the Effective Provision of Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education Project. *Oxford Review of Education*, 40(5), pp.525–542. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2014.953921>.

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Düz, S. and Aslan, T.V., 2020. The effect of sport on life skills in high school students. *Asian Journal of Education and Training*, [online] 6(2), pp.161–168. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.20448/journal.522.2020.62.161.168>.

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Fakhretdinova, G.N., Osipov, P. and Dulalaeva, L.P., 2021. Extracurricular activities as an important tool in developing soft skills. In: M.E. Auer and T. Rützmann, eds., *ICL 2020*. AISC 1329. Switzerland: Springer Nature, pp.480–487. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-68201-9_47.

Mahoney, J., Cairns, B. and Farmer, T., 2003. Promoting interpersonal competence and educational success through extracurricular activity participation. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95(2), pp.409–418. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.95.2.409>.

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Programme Summary

Academic/formal:

We will hold several skills-building sessions that enable collaborative work between teams of 3-6 students - these will include planning, script-writing, crafting, and presentation sessions. Each session will be planned around a specific skill, more specifically: the planning sessions will be centred around project management skills, the script-writing and crafting sessions around collaboration and creativity, and the final presentation around problem solving (which will be present throughout the project regardless).

We will adjust the number of sessions per section of the project depending on how much time the students decide to allocate themselves as we wish to foster project management skills by providing the children autonomy over the planning process. This, of course, does not mean there will be no oversight or a lack of support with the tasks – we shall provide guidance to all of the groups during the project. Furthermore, whilst we will encourage the students to decide how they will run their teams themselves, we will allocate specific sessions or part of sessions to necessary sections of the project, such as the planning, crafting and presentation.

Moreover, we will independently collect primary and secondary data to achieve a better understanding of the current political and policy landscape surrounding the provision of extracurricular education observed in Oxfordshire and the UK in general. This will include several interviews and/or written questionnaires targeting policy-makers, local and national politicians, and the schools' management and operational staff, alongside a literature review mainly focusing on current policy and guidance provided by the national government and NGOs. We hope this research will identify any disparities between different levels of government, types of education, and geographical locations, as well as any differences between theoretical approaches and practical outcomes.

Less formal/for students:

We will hold eight game-making sessions with the aim of producing a “mystery” style game within a few weeks. In teams of 3-6, you will plan how you will make your game, write a plot, make props, and play each other’s games. Each session will teach different skills and test how well you work with each other as you try to create a challenge for the detectives playing your game. Good luck to you and whoever tries to figure out your mystery!

Programme Design

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Session A	<p>Theme: First Ideas</p> <p>Objective: Students will have a simple plan for their mystery</p> <p>Summary: Students will participate in a mystery experience and will fill out their own brainstorming sheet</p>	<p>Theme: Script-writing</p> <p>Objective: Students will develop a script and plan their mystery</p> <p>Summary: We will discuss plot, character and props. Students will either write a script or character descriptions. Ask students which materials are needed for props.</p>	<p>Theme: Prop-making</p> <p>Objective: Students will complete their mystery experience</p> <p>Summary: Students will make any props required (with the help of leaders). They will finalise their script and rehearse their experience, considering where they should add hints.</p>	<p>Theme: Performance</p> <p>Objective: Students will perform and solve their mysteries.</p> <p>Summary: Students will prepare their mysteries. They will alternate solving and performing mysteries. At the end, each team will receive a small prize.</p>
Session B	As above	As above	As above	As above

Research Methods:

Describe your research approach (Quant/Qual, Survey/Interview, Lit Review):

As our group focuses on policy and extracurriculars, we combine a mixture of primary and secondary sources. Our primary data will mainly be gathered through interviews and written questionnaires, with policy-makers, local and national politicians, and the schools' management and operational staff being our targets. We aim to use their insights to achieve a better understanding of the current political and policy landscape observed in Oxfordshire and the UK in general.

We then combine this with our secondary data in the form of a literature review to gain further insight on extracurricular policy, its effects and implementations. Through documents, including government reports and documentation from the Education Policy Institute, we hope to identify any disparities between reported observations and perceptions. This may include differences between levels of government, types of education, and even locations across Oxfordshire or different counties, especially given the huge disparities that exist even within Oxfordshire itself. In a similar fashion, we also hope to identify any matches between reported observations and perceptions, or insights they may feed into each other, in a similar manner as above.

We hope this, combined with first-hand experience and interactions from carrying out our own after-school programme, will lead us to a comprehensive picture on policy, alongside its potential and actualized effects both locally and nationally.

