

**Educational Relationships in Out-of-school-time Activities: Are  
Children in Poverty Missing Out Again?**

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**November 2008**

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### **Abstract**

Poverty may be the major obstacle to positive life chances in the UK. Ennals & Murphy (2005) suggest that escape from the poverty trap is more likely for those who remain in education after the age of 16. However, school life may bring problems for children from low income families, with learning assuming a lower priority than social acceptance (Ridge, 2005). This paper argues that young people in poverty are also less likely to participate in other learning activities. The nature of learning in out-of-school-time settings is explored and the distinctive features of the educational relationships that underpin out-of-school-time learning are discussed. We conclude that children from disadvantaged backgrounds who have acquired an understanding of educational relationships are more likely to develop positive attitudes to learning. Strategies to redress the added disadvantage that non participation in leisure activities creates for young people in low income families are suggested.

### **Key Words**

Educational relationships, poverty, learning, social justice

We would like to thank the Joseph Rowntree Foundation for supporting this research

## **Educational Relationships in Out-of-school-time Activities: Are Children in Poverty Missing Out Again?**

### **Links between education and poverty**

Despite regular Government pledges to reduce barriers to social justice, recent reports from the UK (House of Commons, 2004; Bradshaw, 2005) indicate that large numbers of children (one in six) live in workless households and the numbers of those living in impoverished circumstances is increasing (DWP, 2007). Along with redistribution of taxes and welfare benefits, reforms in education and training have been key channels to social integration and upward mobility (DWP, 2005). It is known that students who carry on in education after the age of 16 are more likely to escape from the poverty trap (Ennals, 2005) while children who experience episodes of poverty are more prone to failure in school (Gregg *et al.*, 1999; HM Treasury, 1999). Arguments have consistently been made that, while poverty is not an excuse for educational failure, multiple social disadvantage is often the reason behind it (Halpin *et al.*, 2004).

The Government has developed a two-pronged strategy to reduce long-term disadvantage. First, it has argued (DfEE, 1997) that raising achievement in schools in areas of social deprivation will counteract low attainment and social exclusion. In England, initiatives intended to raise levels of literacy and numeracy and to tackle school exclusions and truancy (Suther & Piachaud, 2001), such as Sure Start, Education Action Zones (EAZ) and Excellence in Cities (EiC), have offered support and resources to parents and schools. However, evidence of success is muted (Ofsted, 2003; Halpin *et al.*, 2004). While reduced exclusions and truancy have been attributed to the policies, evidence of individual improved attainment is harder to pinpoint.

The second thrust has focussed on encouraging young people with limited financial resources to remain in education. Income benefits such as the Education Maintenance Allowance and Training Tax Credits have combined with initiatives which widen access to higher education and vocational pathways to persuade disadvantaged students to continue learning. But while there is a clear demand for second chance courses (Reay *et al.*, 2002) progression can be less smooth. Problems have been experienced by the students (Reay, *et al.*, 2002; Reay, 2003) and identified by the institutions (Watt & Paterson, 2000). Further, there is acknowledgement that low income families spend their resources disproportionately on housing, heating and food and there is little evidence to link additional income to increased learning experiences or resources (Gregg, *et al.*, 1999).

Therefore, despite myriad social and educational reforms, the Government's initiatives to half child poverty in the UK by 2010 remain unconvincing (Nickell, 2004; Hills, 2004). The key to making education desirable and accessible for those in poverty may lie elsewhere. Those students who choose to continue in education post-16 are likely to have achieved some success in learning before that stage. However, school life may bring particular problems for children from low income families, with learning assuming a lower priority than social acceptance (Ridge, 2005). Poverty also brings a greater likelihood of exclusion or truancy from school. Additionally, low-income children are often unable to access the economic and material resources that are needed for adequate social and academic participation *at* school, and therefore may be in danger of experiencing additional exclusion *within* their schools (Ridge, 2002).

It is vital that this context is well understood. The links between education and prosperity are convincing and current government policies accept that poverty cannot be ameliorated simply by financial support. Whilst this paper is predicated on policy and practice in England, similar concerns have been addressed in the United States by the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) and in Australia by the State of Victoria's children report *Every child; Every chance* (Hood, *et al.*, 2006).

### **Educational relationships**

We have argued elsewhere (Bullock and Wikeley, 2004) that the educational relationships in which learners engage as part of the process of learning have the greatest impact on achievement. Society is based on social relationships and the sense of self or personal identity that children construct develops from social and cultural activities (Holland *et al.*, 1998). Social relationships shape values, influence choices and mould experiences. The first and most influential educational relationships are nurtured within the family (Hughes & Pollard, 2006). Although it is well recognised that the quality of the interaction between parents and their children is more influential on children's academic outcomes than the level of parental income or social background of the family (Hango, 2005), parents bringing up their children in poverty face particular difficulties (HM Treasury, 2004). Poor health and limited opportunities for social contacts, for example, are directly connected to meagre sources of income (Bradshaw, 2005).

As they mature, children embrace wider social networks. Most attend school and the school has traditionally been charged with ameliorating social justice. However, the comparatively small school effect on attainment levels (Cassen & Kingdon, 2007) is a further reason for suggesting that the key to making education desirable and accessible for those in poverty

may lie elsewhere. In its policy paper *Every Child Matters* (HM Treasury, 2003) the UK Government acknowledged the contribution of out-of-school time activities to the well-being of young people. The relationship between out-of-school-time learning and better attainment in school has been strongly stressed by others (MacBeath, *et al.*, 2001; Mahoney, *et al.*, 2005; Vadeboncoeur, 2006). However, the mechanisms and educational relationships that underpin this effect are less well understood.

All contexts in which children interact with others - the home, the school and the community - have specific characteristics with socially constructed rules and expectations guiding behaviour and, therefore, conditioning the personal stances through which children learn and develop (Lave & Wenger, 1998; Dreier, 1999). Wenger (1998) argues that it is through a nexus of multi-group membership that individual identity is fashioned. Within this, the ability to develop and sustain high quality educational relationships with adults may be a key to children's success within the compulsory school system. Knowing how to develop and sustain supportive educational relationships, how to work with others, make sense of, and build on other's expertise appear to be vitally important in improving life chances. Those children with greater experiences of successful, formal and informal educational relationships may stand a better chance of success in terms of developing transferable skills, valuing on-going learning and (ultimately) gaining rewarding employment. We argue that the skills demanded by employers (MacBeath, 2000) are developed over a long period of time through the relationships children and young people have with, in particular, adults in a variety of contexts both in and out of school. Not all children in poverty are destined to remain in the cycle of deprivation. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds who acquire an understanding of educational relationships, and through them, positive approaches to learning, may be advantaged academically and consequently be more likely to break away from the shackles of poverty.

But if the number of children enabled to do this is to be increased, it is necessary to identify the life and school experiences that shape children's expectations of, and attitudes to, education and learning. Understanding, developed through a scrutiny of the experiences of disadvantaged and advantaged children, would allow government policies, school practices and teaching strategies to be more sharply focussed on interventions and activities that would help all students realise their learning potential.

### **The research**

Our research, therefore, explored what young people gain from engagement in out-of-school-time activities that involve a learning intent. We use the term 'educational relationship' to

describe the interactions between learners and instructors. An educational relationship can be formal or informal, implicit or explicit but for at least for one partner in the relationship part of the motivation for engagement in the activity is that it will lead to improvement in skill, knowledge or attitude. It is this learning intention that makes the relationship educational. We gathered data from young people living in poverty and those in more affluent circumstances to address two main questions.

- What do young people gain from engagement in out-of-school-time activities?
- Is there a difference in participation between young people from low income families and those from more affluent homes?

The children were accessed through their schools. The receipt of free school meals (FSM) was used as the most accessible and appropriate indicator of poverty. While this indicator is not flawless, in England, free school meals are available for those pupils whose parents or guardians are unemployed or on a low income, and therefore, already identified as eligible for means tested income benefits. We, therefore, targeted schools in the South West of England with a high proportion of children eligible for free lunches and all the schools were in relatively disadvantaged areas. Engagement with out-of-school-time activities is often a question of opportunity and respondents from Year 6 and Year 9 and from both rural and urban contexts were sampled (although we do not report on this analysis in this paper). The sample is shown in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

Permission for participation was sought both from parents and the children, themselves. Prior to the interview, we invited the youngsters to complete a map of their typical weekly activities. The map formed the focus for the interview with one activity being chosen by the interviewer for more in-depth exploration and one by the children themselves. The former was, when possible, an activity involving adults and taking place on a regular basis. The child was asked to clarify the activities represented on the map: location; other participants; and accessibility. We further explored: reasons for participation; the extent of engagement; the relationship with the adults involved and with the other participants; what the children felt they learned from the activity and how; and whether teachers at school knew of their involvement. Reasons for non participation were also probed and the young people were asked about occasions when they felt they were doing nothing.

The analytical framework had three strands. First, we probed motivations for initial and continued engagement in the activity. Second, we investigated students' perceptions of the

learning that resulted from their engagement in the activities. Finally, we explored the students' conceptualisation of the educational relationships that were experienced and the roles of the participants. Across this, we scrutinised differences between the experiences of children in poverty and their more affluent peers to identify possible discrepancies.

Although data are limited to the experiences of 55 young people, the analysis of the learning that takes place within organised out-of-school-time activities reveals the value and richness of the participation and therefore discloses what is denied to those children unable to take part. Our study (see Wikeley, *et al.*, 2007 for details) highlighted the distinctiveness of learning in these settings and its impact on young people's skills and confidence in learning. We showed that learning in which the young people had freely chosen to participate, enabled them to gain a real understanding of the social and active nature of learning and how interaction with others could support it. The development of a wider specialist vocabulary and extended skills was evident in the discussions. When explicitly asked what they had learnt from out-of-school-time activities, students articulated skills, aptitudes and attitudes with a clear understanding of what they had gained. Increased levels of confidence were frequently cited. Amy<sup>1</sup> discussed her greater sense of self worth resulting from her involvement with the drama club.

*I've been speaking out more for what I think. I've done drama in front of the class and in assembly (Y6 girl).*

### **Learning from educational relationships out of school**

This educational relationship between young people and the adults in the out-of-school-time activities was a strong factor in participation and continued membership. Interviewees consistently stressed that this relationship was very different from their relationships with teachers in school. .

*..it's quieter in a smaller group, and you're not too shy. The teachers are more fun in Drama Group. They're not really a teacher; they're just there to help out with us. (Y6 rural girl)*

*I have a better [relationship] with Miss L, because I see her about, I see her for one hour on Tuesday morning for my P.E. lesson, then I see her on Monday. So I know her quite well. (Y6 rural girl)*

*Most of the staff [at Air Training Corps] are friends with the people there so we get on well. (Y9 rural boy FSM)*

We identified two main roles for the adults – supervisory and role model. The data suggested that there is a distinction between structured out-of-school activities – such as sports teams

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<sup>1</sup> All respondents have been given pseudonyms

and drama productions - where there are overarching purposes, rules and outcomes, and the less structured clubs and groups where the adult involvement is not 'teaching' but limited to a more peripheral, mainly supervisory role. It was this type of interaction that distinguished the more unstructured formal activities such as Youth Clubs and Church Groups. General activities were on offer and the adults occasionally joined in, but their main role was providing the facilities, supervising in a general way and taking the money or running the refreshment area. The distant nature of the relationship was often indicated by a mere noting of their presence rather than an explanation of their involvement.

I<sup>2</sup>: *And do the adults join in the activities with you?*

R: *Yeah they join in some of the activities.*

I: *Right and what else do they do?*

R: *Just supervise us. (Y9 urban boy FSM)*

The adults sometimes joined in the activity but their presence was seen to be peripheral to anything the child learned from that activity. Claire described in detail all the activities in which she participated at the Church Club - badminton, air football, darts, table tennis... - but did not mention the adults until asked specifically what they did.

I: *.... So what do the adults do?*

R: *They watch out but some of them sing with you and that later she added there's another one in the tuck shop and there's D... he's a teacher (Y6 rural girl FSM)*

It was clear that the children did, sometimes, learn from these adults; but they were not seen as a central part of the activity.

R: *..... and do they join in? Do they...?*

R: *Yeah they can join in. Yeah they normally do.*

I: *And do they teach you things? ....., I mean ..., are they like teachers?*

R: *They normally teach us new games.*

I: *Right.*

R: *And how we can change the rules a bit and put it into our own rules. (Y9 rural girl)*

In the more structured formal activities the adults were a key element of the children's involvement. They were seen as role models and the children aspired to the particular proficiencies which they attributed to these leaders. Their expertise was their contribution to the activity; not their adulthood. In fact, in some activities the children, themselves, were more expert than other adult participants and this added to their understanding of the educational relationship.

R: *....the lower grades are from five years old to, well, adults... 'cos adults start joining as well.*

I: *And is that something you like about it; that people are all different ages at different stages, it doesn't matter how old you are, you can be a very senior person.*

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<sup>2</sup> I is interviewer; R is respondent

R: *Yeah, and it's sort of something different from at school, it's not the adults always telling you what to do. (Y9 rural girl)*

Whatever role the leader played in the activity, the relationship was construed by young people as different from that with adults in school: even when the same person was involved (such as teachers taking drama or sports clubs). Out of school, adults were perceived as more approachable and friendly. Although the adults in the clubs could be strict and quite demanding they were much more likely to be described as friends and the predominant word used in relation to both the adults and the activities was 'fun'. This is in contrast to school teachers who were rarely discussed in this way. As one Year 9 girl said:

*Teachers don't often take into consideration our feelings, how you feel you want to learn or how you feel you learn best. While another confessed: Some teachers wind me up I know they're older and they have the right to shout at us because they're teachers, but they just take advantage of us.*

Although there was an acknowledgment that some teachers were more approachable...

*The good teachers show respect - they give you the right to say something, like if they're having a go at you they actually give you the right to have your opinion.*

...they were described as the 'good' teachers whereas in the clubs approachability was accepted as the norm. This contributed to the relationship being seen as being more equal, with children believing in their own agency even when they did not appear to be using it.

The young people distinguished between activities out of school and similar activities in school by commenting on, not only the voluntary nature of their own participation, but also the voluntary involvement of the adults. The young people acknowledged that, like them, the adults had chosen to engage with the activity itself and this led to a real feeling of shared community. Everyone was involved because they chose to do so. Barbara trains with a football club.

I: *..who organises it, who trains you?*

R: *Erm a person, well a girl called D.. and someone I train with's dad called C...*

I: *Ok. And why do they train, what do they know about football?*

R: *Well erm, C.. is like a referee and everything.*

I: *Right.*

R: *And D.. enjoys playing football and everything and she just joined the club to help.*

(Y9 urban girl)

Thus power seemed more evenly distributed in these formal out-of-school clubs and the young people understood themselves to be active agents in own learning. The key factor in creating this sense of shared community appeared to be the collective nature of the task goals. The students aligned their goals in participating with those of the adults and felt they had an element of choice in the nature and degree of their participation. This accords with Roth & Lee's (2006) vision of authentic learning communities.

Nonetheless, the out-of-school-time activities had clear disciplinary rules, but these were seen as part of discipline of the content rather than a mechanism for control. This led to the children dismissing our questions about discipline. In all cases they were aware of the rules and what happened when they were broken – swimming extra lengths, running around the rugby field, being barred from attendance – but these were not common circumstances. Discipline was consistently applied and maintained but it was generally accepted without complaint, in contrast to that in school. An 11-year old described how everybody kept to, and accepted, the rules in the youth club.

*You're not allowed to have food and drink at badminton because you're not allowed to take drinks in there. And you're not allowed to run around, you've got to walk. And the only place you're allowed to run around is in the badminton area and outside the chairs, and that's it really.* (Y6 rural girl FSM)

She explained that a miscreant would not be sent home as a punishment: *That's a waste of our money.* Rather they would be asked to miss the next session. The children reported many incidents of self regulation. Isobel (Y6 girl) explained how the girls in her netball club behave well, *'cos no one really mucks about because they want to get on with the game.* Robert discussed the behaviour in his drama club. *The only time we chat is when we're practising and we talk about the scenarios* (Y6 boy). Robert went on to say that the children behaved better in the drama club than they did in the classroom and suggested this was because *there's more to do so it's not boring.* Alice contrasted her coaches to teachers. *They don't shout as much as teachers. I don't know why* and agreed that group behaviour is better in her football team. *The coach gives them a warning and people do as they are told.* These perceptions were shared by most of the children attending out-of-school time activities. Such experiences allowed young people to manage their behaviour in such a way as to make better relationships with teachers. Alice was one of many who described how they had improved their behaviour as a result of joining an after school club.

*I wasn't that well behaved for Miss L..., but then I improved my behaviour, so now we get on alright. ... I don't know why but I was just answering back, and then I improved my behaviour* (Y6 girl).

### **Influence of Poverty on Participation**

These findings indicate the potential for out-of-school-time activities supplementing and enhancing the learning of all young people. The number and range of activities in which 11 and 14-year olds engage was notable and our findings from this small study mirrored those from larger cohorts (McBeath, *et al.*, 2001; DfES, 2006). More disturbingly, our research emphasised the influence of poverty on participation. While care must be taken in interpreting quantitative data from this small sample, Table 2 shows the higher numbers (and comparatively higher percentages) of children in poverty who were not attending some kind

of formal activity after school, and indicates some differential experiences of formal out-of-school-time activities between children in poverty and their peers.

[Table 2 about here]

The figures worsen when examined by age. Table 3 reveals that in Year 6 a quarter (3) of the 12 poorer children were not attending formal activities compared with only 1 of 14 in the more affluent group. In the Year 9 sample, 5 out of 16 affluent children were missing out on formal out-of-school-time activities, compared with over half (8) of the 13 children receiving free school lunches.

[Table 3 about here]

One of the values of a study of this kind is that it illustrates the diversity of children's lives outside the school setting and exposes the wide range of formal and informal activities in which they are involved. While informal activities were similar for young people in receipt of free school meals and their more affluent peers, there were substantive differences between the type and quality of activities experienced. In general it was children from more prosperous homes who attended more structured activities including school council, art, music, drama and sport. Although some poorer children attended similar clubs, they were generally more reliant on school provision with cricket, drama and football all provided by the school or youth clubs where adults assumed supervisory responsibilities rather than a role model.

Such findings raise concerns about the range and quality of after-school experiences that low-income children are able to access. The school is clearly an important source of formal leisure opportunities for young people in poverty, and there is some evidence that if low-income children are sporty they might be noticed at school and, perhaps, steered towards external clubs. This was the case for Natalie, a Year 9 girl receiving free school lunches and living in an urban area, who was spotted as a talented athlete at school and encouraged to attend a local athletics club. However, not all children are sporty and in some instances youngsters reported a lack of opportunities for leisure at their schools, particularly if they were not keen on sports. Leanne wanted to take part in clubs but felt that school provision was unsuited to her needs

*I could stay on at school but I'd probably end up walking home because my dad would be at work and there's not really anything at the school that I like because it's always sports. I just don't like exercise. I'm a very lazy person. (Y9 rural girl FSM)*

### **Barriers to Attendance**

A complex array of factors affecting children's engagement with formal out-of-school-time activities was revealed. For poorer children there were a range of issues and concerns which often overlapped and interacted with each other. They combined to form an intricate constellation of disadvantages which inhibited opportunities for formal out-of-school experiences.

#### **i) Availability and cost**

A key element in less affluent children's attendance was the availability, or perception of availability, of formal activities in their schools and neighbourhoods. This was a complex issue linked both to access and cost and children's perceptions of what was possible and open to them. It was clear that many of these children felt that there were no opportunities for out-of-school time activities either after school or in their neighbourhoods. This lack of opportunity and choice was compounded by difficulties in gaining access to whatever was available. Previous research (Ridge 2002), has shown that the cost of attending is a key factor for low-income children accessing out-of-school opportunities. Concerns about the costs of joining, entrance fees and equipment were clearly evident. Transport was also a big worry that often dictated whether poorer children could participate in activities. Jackie wanted to go to dance classes like her friends but they were held in a nearby town and she could not afford the transport to get there

*It's not that far but you'd have to pay a bus journey and you've got to pay for it when you get there. That's a lot of money (Y9 rural girl FSM)*

Some activities, like football, required parents to take their children to away matches. This was particularly problematic for families without the means to join in car sharing arrangements. Lack of transport can be a barrier for low-income parents who may be reluctant to enter into reciprocal arrangements for attending clubs and events. This had an impact on children like James, a Y6 rural low-income boy, who played football with his friend, but was unable to go the football club because of the cost of joining and getting to training and matches.

#### **ii) Families and friends**

Another contributor to poorer children's lack of formal activities was the greater time and commitment they devoted to family life and practices. Several children came from large families or were living in complex and re-formed families. Bradshaw (2006) has shown that these families are likely to be particularly disadvantaged. However, while the time spent with non-resident fathers and step families potentially reduced opportunities for out-of-school-time activities, in some cases, time spent with non-resident fathers was a valuable

social resource. Some children told of diverse activities with their fathers including drag racing, mountain biking and attending football matches. Nonetheless the educational relationship with a different adult was still lacking.

Occasionally, family life was chaotic and this militated against attendance. Gill (aged 14) had undertaken a range of family responsibilities including cooking and caring for her two brothers, one of whom had behaviour problems. Her opportunities to take part in formal activities were severely constrained. As she explained any clubs would have to take her brothers as well as her, she was also concerned about coming home late to find that social services or the bailiffs had visited. Her home life was clearly too unstable for her to feel secure about taking time out for herself. She had moved back to her mother's from her father's and she showed a keen sense of how her life had changed and its impact on her own well-being.

*I do my own thing at my mum's, I get what I want, but not what I need. But at my dad's I get what I need, but less of what I want. (Y9 rural girl FSM)*

She had previously enjoyed attending a trampolining club with her friend, when she lived with her father, but since moving back to her mother's she had fallen out with her new friends and did not feel that the school had a good opinion of her. The tensions between her social difficulties and her responsibilities at home had inhibited her willingness trying to engage with formal activities especially those at school. Gill's experiences highlight the importance of secure friendships for initiating and sustaining children in formal activities. Some of the children were having difficulties sustaining friendships, or had experienced some bullying. The importance of having friends to encourage and share experiences with was evident and some children who had been attending clubs had dropped out when their friends stopped going.

### iii) Self perceptions

Where there were no affordable formal activities for children they were generally frustrated and disappointed. But this lack of opportunity was sometimes mapped onto their sense of self as a non-attende; someone who does not want to engage in the same way as others. Some non-attending youngsters said that they preferred to be at home with their families rather than going to clubs. A discourse of difference was apparent in several accounts. Simon saw himself as 'a loner' and disliked sports. He would have liked to go to a youth club but thought that there was nothing available for him. *I'm not really into going around in groups and stuff. (Y9 boy FSM)*

For Celia opportunities in her rural neighbourhood seemed particularly sparse. However as she explained school activities are not her thing; she is different:

*We don't have a youth club in [village] so there's nothing to do really with other village people, apart from going down to the park. I don't really join in with all the after school stuff because it doesn't seem that appealing to me, which may sound a bit harsh, but I'm just a bit different to everyone else'. (Y9 rural girl FSM)*

These comments support previous research with low-income children (Ridge, 2002; Daly and Leonard, 2002) showing that children who are unable to join with other children in shared activities often save face by cover their inability to participate with seeming indifference.

In addition to this distancing of oneself as an attendee, some young people in poverty lacked confidence when considering the possibility of joining formal clubs. School clubs were seen as too bossy, always full, and difficult to get into. Some found it very difficult to imagine the process of attending; they wanted to take part but were not able to find out about locations, times and access. These children's attitudes to formal clubs were complex and nuanced. While they saw barriers to participation and in some cases feigned indifference to attending, they were often keen to try the activities that their peers enjoyed. Sally did not attend any clubs and felt that they would be hard work, but she talked enthusiastically about all the things she would like to do; for example, football (but boys would tease her), gym, ballet, guitar, horse riding (but too expensive). She really liked computers but would not ask about the school computer club. *I can't ask because... I feel like every time I ask I think it's rude.* She also loved swimming but rarely goes, although she had been able to swim regularly at school in the past:

*when I was in Year 3 we went swimming lessons and that. But when we're in Year 4 we can only go when we're in Year 5. And I'm really angry I can't understand why can Years 3 and 5 go, but we can't go (Y6 rural girl FSM).*

The experiences of children like Sally further indicate that school provision of formal leisure opportunities may be particularly important for younger children, when they are not able to access shared peer group activities elsewhere. In this small sample, there were considerably fewer affluent children who were not attending formal clubs. Their reasons for non-attendance mapped closely to those offered by the less affluent group with family commitments and capricious friendships cited. However, although showing some similarity with regard to family and friends these more affluent children did not express the same set of concerns as the poorer children in relation to cost, transport and access. Nor had they developed a discourse of difference or indifference in relation to taking part.

### **Implications for policy and practice**

We started with the premise that if the educational attainment and subsequent life chances of children in poverty are to be improved we need to look beyond school-based initiatives to the experiences of children engaging in learning in other contexts. Our findings showed that

young people gained from being involved in out-of-school-time activities in a variety of ways. Not only did they acquire factual information but they benefitted from being in an educational relationship with a different adult. This educational relationship nurtured an understanding of responsibilities, authority and on-going learning. Further, it shaped self confidence and an identity as a participator. However, our study also suggest that children from families in receipt of free school meals participate less in formal out-of-school-time activities. This, it seems, is a source of increased disadvantage when it comes to negotiating other learning environments, particularly school.

Our findings have several messages for both policy makers and practitioners. Young people in poverty need smooth access to out-of-school-time activities. Enabling such access through the provision of subsidised clubs and concessionary transport could have real influence on children's engagement with learning. Two of us (Bullock and Wikeley, 2004) make the point elsewhere that seeing such access as an entitlement for all rather than an expensive provision for an elite or an intervention for the disadvantaged often has a major impact on take-up. Another point relates to the use of school buildings both in terms of being part of the provision for younger children (we found older children often did not join school clubs but preferred off-site alternatives) but also acting as a facility to be used by other learning communities in areas where such facilities are limited.

Policy makers must accept that schools have particular parameters within which they must work and that they provide a major (but not sole) contribution to the effective life chances of young people. The value of out-of-school-time activities lies in their difference from school activities and the diversity of the experiences; but better out-of-school provision could have a notable impact on learning in schools. Our study indicated that where this occurs, it is because young people's educational relationships with teachers have changed. Key factors in facilitating this appear to be: students' perceptions of adults in the out-of-school-time activities as co-learners; the genuine collective intent or purpose; and an understanding of authority to facilitate participation rather than for control. However, these are always going to be problematic for the relationship between teachers and students in schools where the delivery of prescribed curricula and syllabi changes little from year to year and teachers are always seen as 'holders of the knowledge'. How teachers make explicit, within their teaching role, their own position as a co-learner needs further exploration.

We conclude that out-of-school-time activities are beneficial because they are genuine learning communities with all members, adults and children, having a common aim and making real contributions to the learning of the group. In their conceptualisation of the roles

of adults, young people described their out-of-school activities in terms of Roth and Lee's (2006) criteria of genuine (learning) communities. Involvement is by choice, each individual chooses how and the extent to which they contribute. Individuals come and go and therefore perceptions of expertise change with the young people being able to contribute their greater knowledge and understanding of the activity to the new members.

The comparative conceptualisation of the roles of adults as teachers in school showed that, unlike adults in out-of-school clubs, classroom teachers tend not to be regarded as role models. Teachers are seen as part of the institutional structure rather than part of the learning activity. Educational relationships in school have greater power imbalance. Young people were involved in out-of-school time activities because they chose to be. As Roth and Lee comment for learning communities to be real, free choice in terms of involvement and contribution is essential. Policy makers need to consider that this kind of learning might best be provided in out-of-school time.

Young people learn in a variety of contexts including home, school and out-of-school. All three of these strands are crucial and each develops strategies and practice that might inform and enhance the others. The importance of a stable home life in counteracting anti-social behaviour has frequently been stressed. We argue that out-of-school time activities complement and complete the triad.

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Table 1: The Sample

	RURAL		URBAN		TOTAL
	<i>Free school meals</i>	<i>More affluent</i>	<i>Free school meals</i>	<i>More affluent</i>	
<b>Primary (Year 6)</b>	6	8	6	6	26
<b>Secondary (Year 9)</b>	7	10	6	6	29
<b>Total</b>	13	18	12	12	55

Table 2: Engagement in formal after school activities by financial status

FINANCIAL STATUS	AFTER SCHOOL ACTIVITIES		TOTALS
	<i>Free School Meals</i>	<i>More affluent</i>	
<b>Formal activities</b>	14	24	38
<b>No formal activities</b>	11	6	17
<i>All children</i>	25	30	55

Table 3: Engagement in formal after school activities by year group and financial status

Financial Status	After school activities by year group		Totals
	<i>Free School Meals</i>	<i>More affluent</i>	
<b>Formal activities Year 6</b>	9	13	22
<b>No formal activities Year 6</b>	3	1	4
<i>All year 6</i>	12	14	26
<b>Formal activities Year 9</b>	5	11	16
<b>No formal activities Year 9</b>	8	5	13
<i>All year 9</i>	13	16	29