

## Evaluation of Learning Away

### Hypothesis 4: Relationships

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This report should be cited as: CUREE (2012) *Evaluation of Learning Away: Hypothesis 4: Relationships*. London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

## Hypothesis 4: Relationships

*High quality residential learning programmes foster deeper teacher / adult-student and student-student relationships that can be sustained back in school and result in improved learner engagement and achievement.*

### Background

An 'interpersonal relationship' is an association between two or more people that may range from fleeting to enduring. Interpersonal relationships usually involve some level of interdependence: people in a relationship tend to influence each other, share their thoughts and feelings, and engage in activities together. Relationships between pupils and adults in schools, and among pupils themselves, have been found to be critical to pupil engagement, and have a positive impact on achievement<sup>1</sup>. One study calculated that the effect size of positive teacher-pupil relationships on achievement was large (0.72)<sup>2</sup>. Relationships are also explored in hypotheses 8 and 9.

### Programme-wide outcomes related to relationships

Clusters reported improved relationships between students and staff and between students.

#### Improved student-staff relationships

*a) Enhanced knowledge and understanding of each other*

All clusters quoted better relationships between staff and students both during and after the residential. Students and staff felt that the residential gave them time to '*understand each other better*'. A member of staff from Burley cluster commented, '*I now look at a very strong character differently because I have seen her vulnerable side*'. One teacher from the Calderglen cluster frankly admitted that she '*didn't have a very good teacher - relationship with some of the children in the year group*'. She felt that with the more relaxed atmosphere the residential created, it was easier to identify the positive things the students were doing. She felt that the residential gave her the chance to '*build bridges with some students and bring those positive relationships back into school*'.

*b) Showing attention and developing trust*

Similarly, many students (particularly the more vulnerable) commented on how teachers listened to them more and dealt with situations more effectively on residential. Hanover cluster reported, for example, how one child in particular found it difficult to trust adults and was nervous about going on the trip as she has a bed-wetting problem. The post residential group work<sup>3</sup> evaluation activity revealed that she felt this was dealt with effectively by staff and she was able to form a trusting relationship with them.

Although the clusters themselves did not report on whether the improved staff-student relationships seemed to make any difference to engagement or achievement, as outlined in the previous section, wider research suggests that it does.

#### Improved peer relationships

*a) Tolerance and better team working*

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in: Rogers, C. & Freiberg, H.J. (1993) *Freedom to learn*. 3rd edn. New York: Merrill. Summary available at: [www.gtce.org.uk/tla/rft/rogers1008/](http://www.gtce.org.uk/tla/rft/rogers1008/)

<sup>2</sup> Hattie, J. (2009) *Visible Learning: a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. London: Routledge Taylor and Francis.

<sup>3</sup> See: [www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk/resource-area/teaching-resources/who-am-i/blob-tree/](http://www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk/resource-area/teaching-resources/who-am-i/blob-tree/).

Alongside their improved relationships with staff, all clusters reported on how the students developed better relationships with each other. In particular, students worked better as a team and listened to each other more. For example, at Tallis, when completing a plank-balancing exercise students made contributions such as:

A: *"It will be easier if I go in front because I'm lighter."*

Others: *"No! You aren't as strong you won't be able to pull it so far!"*

Staff in most clusters noted students' better tolerance of alternative points of view with students inviting their peers' opinions.

#### *b) Caring and supportive attitude*

Students displaying a caring attitude was an often unexpected, but widely observed and recorded phenomenon. There were many examples of when the children encouraged each other as they participated in challenging, outdoor activities and / or spontaneously congratulated each other after they had successfully completed them. The caring and supportive attitude was also evident during daily routines whilst sharing rooms and tents. Members of staff from Christ Church cluster, for example, highlighted examples such as:

- three boys sitting on a bed – one boy reading a 'Goosebumps' book to the other two, but saying 'blank' when he got to a scary bit, because the boys were a bit scared; two boys quietly playing 'Top Trumps' in their room, being really kind to each other; and
- the general thoughtfulness of the girls when getting ready in the morning – doing each other's hair, etc.

#### **Students developing new friendships**

Participating in the residential also helped the students to develop much wider networks of friends. Not only did the children get to '*know [their] friends better*', their friendship groups were also extended to those in their classes they had never spoken with before; as well as students from different schools and age groups, as these students commented:

*"We've got to know everyone in our groups, I know all of their names off by heart and it's good to know people well."*

*"I have learnt to work in different groups with children that I don't normally work with."*

The students' improved relationships had a noticeable impact on engagement during the residential. For example, East EAZ teachers noted how their pupils completed a group work task well after they had worked together in the morning, which they felt was because the pupils had been able to develop closer relationships with each other during the morning activities. Canterbury cluster students commented how some of their peers had initially been very quiet and resistant about taking part in the activities. But after a while these students became more confident. The students felt that everyone being so supportive and respectful had been crucial to helping them try things out and experience success.

Several clusters noted improvements in engagement being sustained after the residential with some examples particularly highlighting the role of improved relationships:

*“They worked better as a team and seemed to listen to each other and be more enthusiastic...even the quieter ones of the group were joining the discussion.”* (Staff member, Newall Green)

*“The dynamics of the class changed. The children who always took front stage at school were outshone by others who had really good ideas.”* (Staff member, Thomas Tallis)

Hanover cluster described in detail the difference that improved relationships with hispeers made to one boy during the residential, and that this led to lasting effects back at school.

Before the residential, the child was easily distracted from tasks in school and sometimes slow to complete work. He was aware of this and lacked self-esteem over managing it. Although keen to succeed, he regularly failed to do so. Talking to the child before the residential revealed that he had a difficult relationship with another child and often felt a victim in their relationship. The school had been aware of this on occasion, but not realised the impact it was having on the child.

The child enjoyed the residential enormously, rating it 10/10. He claimed: *“I was happy because I felt safe and had lots of fun.”* He also commented: *“I made more friends and got to know people a bit more.”* The issue with the other child turned into a big argument on camp. After the residential, the child commented that the adults on camp, *“dealt with it properly, for once”*. He explained that after the camp, life in school became much better and that he enjoyed school more than he expected because of this.

The staff concluded that talking to the child before and after the residential enabled them to understand and meet his needs more effectively. The residential also revealed a friendship problem which was dealt with effectively by staff. This had lasting effects back in school.

One cluster, Canterbury, highlighted the positive role of improved relationships on achievement. Their residential focused on improving relationships and bringing the curriculum to life. The cluster noted that the numbers of students, particularly lower-ability learners, achieving vocational qualifications in courses were much higher for the modules (Units 2 and 6) that included outdoor and residential learning. For example, the pass rate for Unit 2 (skills) and Unit 6 (Adventurous Activities) of the Public Services BTEC (Level 2, GCSE equivalent) was 95%. The pass rates for the other units ranged from 60% for Unit 4 (Citizenship) to 75% for Unit 3 (Fitness) and Unit 1 (Introduction to Public Services).

### **Common features in the clusters’ approaches to securing relationships**

Improved relationships were no accident. Building relationships was an important goal of residential learning for most clusters and so clusters planned activities which involved children working in a team. Sometimes students were deliberately encouraged to work with children they wouldn’t normally work with. Having time to get to know each other through working in a different context was highlighted as a combined factor in improving relationships.

#### **Team work activities**

Group work and team-building activities were frequently included in the residentials. Examples of such activities included students working in groups to build shelters from available materials (East EAZ), making compost heaps (Burley), and cooking for the rest of the camp (Hanover). Sometimes,

children were often offered moral problems and dilemmas to solve, such as deciding between protecting the beautiful wood they lived in during the residential and building new houses for those that need them.

### **Working with others**

Sometimes clusters set out to deliberately involve students in working with students they didn't usually work with. So whilst the clusters worked hard to ensure that the students shared rooms or tents with their friends, they tended to ensure the young people worked in groups on learning activities that included students not in their immediate friendship groups, and often with students they had not known before, to *'take them out of their comfort zone' and 'extend and develop their relationships'*. Some clusters took this further by enabling students to mix with students from other schools. For example, East EAZ organised a number of residentials on the themes of 'Respect for the world' and 'Other cultures' each attended by a combination of children from 2-3 schools. The children were put into mixed school groups during the day and completed their activities in these. The children were encouraged to work collaboratively with children from different classes, ability groups and schools and to reflect on their role within the various groups.

### **Extended time**

Spending extended time together was highlighted as a key factor in improving both student-staff and student-peer relationships. Clusters reported how the residentials gave students and staff time to *'understand each other better.'* Teachers had the time to talk to the students and *'see beyond the behaviour'* (teacher, Walney), which helped them to understand the students more. Students also noted the benefits of spending time together. As one student, from Calderglen cluster, commented: *'I felt I was better friends with the ones I went with and that I had made friends with people that I didn't really talk to before.'*

### **New context**

Staff and students also benefited from changes in the group dynamics due to the new context and environment, which lacked the stress and pressure that some of them associated with their school and home life. Members of staff felt they had an opportunity to *'see students as individuals, see the whole person in each of them'* (teacher, Canterbury). Similarly, pupils saw their teachers from a different perspective, appreciating when staff were willing to take on new challenges alongside them, and when they showed empathy and understanding.

The experiences of Walney illustrate several of the features in the clusters' approaches to securing relationships. The students stayed within their existing friendship groups whilst sleeping, but were grouped with different students during the activities in order to *'take them out of their comfort zones'*. One staff member explained that it was an opportunity for the students to demonstrate how they could work together effectively as a team – to each other and their secondary teachers. Another important aspect of the residential was teaching the students basic life skills. For example they had to make fires, clear up the camp, make their own packed lunches, learn how to prepare and serve meals on a limited budget, and develop good table manners to make communal living work well.

Mingling and bonding with new people increased pupils' confidence in forming friendships - a key goal for transition. Students also cited the *'lack of pressure'* as a reason for this, and said

that they felt more confident in asking for help when they started their new school. Their improved ability to build friendships with new people was specifically linked with the decisions they had to make about use of free time that was planned into the residential by several teachers.

## Possible explanations for the outcomes

### The development of relationships

The findings from the Paul Hamlyn LA cluster echo and illustrate in many ways findings from the wider evidence base relating to the importance of residential for creating conditions conducive to the development of relationships. Fleming (1998)<sup>4</sup> identified some key elements that enabled relationships to develop during residential programmes. They included:

- participants dropped their facades – their professional titles, roles and behaviours;
- informal bonding took place through opportunities not normally available in school (such as sleeping in the same room or tent); and
- relationships formed between individuals who would not normally choose each other's company

These elements can be seen in the clusters' experiences. Staff and students were able to see each other in a different light as teachers took part in experiences *alongside* their students; and children bonded with each other both during daily routines and the activities, with many forming new relationships.

### Improved engagement and achievement

The wider evidence base highlights the importance of relationships for engagement and achievement. Problems in relationships with their teachers and peers were identified as key factors in students' disengagement from education<sup>5</sup>. The clusters' findings illustrate the role that improved relationships played in helping students to engage more fully in tasks (particularly group activities) on the residential and in some cases after the residential. The wider evidence base also highlights the role that positive relationships, especially with adults<sup>6</sup>, play in contributing to children's resilience and wellbeing<sup>7</sup> which are in turn linked to improved learner outcomes<sup>8</sup>. Canterbury cluster

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<sup>4</sup> Fleming, J. A. (1998) Understanding Residential Learning: The Power of Detachment and Continuity, *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48(4), pp.260-271.

<sup>5</sup> Lloyd-Jones, S., Bowen, R., Holtom, D., Griffin, T. & Sis, J. (2010) *A qualitative research study to explore young people's disengagement from learning* [online]. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government. [Accessed 28 Feb 2012]. Available at: <<http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/570/1/100715disengagementreporten.pdf>>.

<sup>6</sup> Luthar, S. S. (2006). Resilience in development: A synthesis of research across five decades. In D. Cicchetti and D. J. Cohen (Eds.) *Developmental Psychopathology* (2nd ed.): Vol. 3 Risk, Disorder, and Adaptation (pp. 739-795). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.

<sup>7</sup> CUREE & University of Wolverhampton Probe 5: What are the practical curriculum connections being made between wellbeing and achievement? *To what extent have curriculum innovations, e.g. local adaptations of Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) drawn a link between the wellbeing and achievement agendas?* Coventry: CUREE. Available at: [www.curee-paccts.com/our-projects/qcda-building-evidence-base](http://www.curee-paccts.com/our-projects/qcda-building-evidence-base).

believed that the students' improved pass rates were at least partly due to a focus on developing relationships.

## **Conclusions**

The clusters clearly succeeded in boosting relationships between staff and students and between students during the residential. The residential enabled staff to build bridges with some students and enabled some students to start to trust staff more. There was also evidence of improved peer relationships. Students became more tolerant and caring of each other and developed a wider circle of friends. These improved peer relationships were sustained after the residential. Several clusters noted improved engagement back at school, with some highlighting the role of positive peer relationships. Few clusters reported specifically on whether the improved staff-student relationships made a difference to pupil engagement or achievement, although, as mentioned previously, wider research suggests that it does.

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<sup>8</sup> Weare, K. & Gray, G. (2003) *What Works in Developing Children's Emotional and Social Wellbeing?* Research Report RR456. London: Department for Education and Skills. Available at: [www.education.gov.uk/publications/RSG/Welfareandbehaviour/Page1/RR456](http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/RSG/Welfareandbehaviour/Page1/RR456).