

# **Triggering and sustaining extra-curricular engagement as a route to resilience in middle childhood**

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By

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## **Declaration**

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed

Dated

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## Abstract

Literature indicates that participation in extra-curricular activities (ECA) providing benefits for children and young people. There is evidence that children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit most from ECA but they participate less than children from more affluent backgrounds. We know little about how ECA begins and then is sustained for these benefits to embed. Research tells us that ECA participation diminishes after the age of eleven and a child who has not participated in ECA before they transition to secondary school will likely never participate throughout their education. Early experience of ECA would appear to be crucial, especially for disadvantaged children facing adversity who may benefit most.

This research aimed to illuminate how ECA is triggered and sustained for a disadvantaged child in middle childhood (age 9–11) from accounts of successful ECA engagement for 20 disadvantaged children facing adversity in UK primary schools. Accounts were drawn from semi-structured interviews with twenty school practitioners who ran the ECA. Utilising a qualitative critical realist methodology this thesis offers a theoretical explanation of the events reported in these accounts of successful triggering and sustaining ECA participation. A theoretical explanation of triggering ECA is offered through Bourdieu's notion of *field* – the existence of the field and the practitioner inviting the child into the field of ECA. Sustaining ECA is identified with Vygotsky's *zone of proximal development* ensuring the child's improved competency and sense of belonging to the field of ECA. Sustaining is also linked to Bourdieu's *habitus* formation in alignment to the field of ECA – the child learning how to play the game. The accounts illustrated many children displaying impressive habitus adjustments from complete novices in the ECA field to becoming ECA ambassadors within one academic year and the thesis proposes the notion of a *resilient habitus* to signify successful alignments between contrasting fields.

The emergent resilient outcome was analysed by understanding of the process of ECA engagement. This suggested that resilience should not be considered a personal character trait or outcome alone but an emergent quality through a dynamic engagement between child and their environment. The thesis highlighted what schools can do for ECA to provide a resilient building route for disadvantaged children facing adversity. It recommends ECA should become part of the everyday curriculum and experienced by every child – expanding pathways to competency building and children's chances of enjoying success.

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My gratitude to my two further supervisors, Josh Cameron and Suna Eryigit-Wadsmamuse, who took over the helm from Angie and guided me through the field, indicating the rules of the game.

To places, real and imagined where I escaped when the going seemed tough.

My eternal love to my Aisha and Anna: at the end of the day you beautifully anchored me down to earth.



## **Abbreviations**

Co-Regulation theory (CRT)

Expectancy/Value theory (EVT)

Extra-Curricular Activities (ECA)

Free School Meal (FSM)

Self-Determination theory (SDT)

Self-Regulation theory SRT

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)

The Social Mobility Commission (SMC)

## Glossary

The following words and terms from the title of this research relate specifically to the research conducted in this thesis.

**Triggering** - the process of initiating a child's first ever introduction to an extra-curricular activity (ECA)

**Sustaining** – the process of facilitating a child's participation in ECA for a period of at least six months.

**Extra-curricular Activity** – adult-supervised activities in school that are non-compulsory.

**Middle childhood** – the equivalent to Key Stage 2 in UK primary schools; children aged between 8-11 years.

**Engagement** – the process of promoting participation and interest in an ECA.

**Route** – the events of at least six months' engagement in ECA.

**Resilience** -. the process of a disadvantaged child facing adversity performing better in school through the route of ECA engagement. This is a dynamic process between child and environment, the emergent outcome cannot be analysed without an understanding of the journey.

**Practitioner** – an adult running/structuring the ECA within a school.

## Chapter 1. Why would I?

Many years ago, before I knew the themes and notions discussed in this thesis, I watched a teenage lad from Preston (UK) rock climb. He had come to Cumbria with his school for a week's outdoor education, paid for by Lancashire County Council in the UK.

His class stood at the bottom of the crag and took it in turns to rope-up and then climb the section of rock in Dungeon Ghyll. That morning it was the usual procession of fear, encouragement and relief as everyone hauled themselves to the top, sometimes with a secure tug from the rope. Then it was the boy's turn. I watched him glide, for there is no other word to express the ease by which he moved, seemingly effortlessly, up the rock.

'Wow!' I remember saying. 'Have you ever done this before?'

'No!' he answered, indifferently. 'Why would I?'

It was his blunt answer, and my lack of experience that curtailed any attempt to talk to him about his apparent potential and that he should take it up as a hobby. I presumed he was one of those who, despite living within an hour of the National Park, never visited the Lake District except on a school trip such as this and would possibly never return. 'Why would I?' indicated either a total lack of interest, or that activities like rock climbing were not pursued by people like him. Possibly it was both. For me, in that moment, it seemed futile recommending a leisure pursuit to a teenager who had, most probably, no access to the climbing opportunities, and possibly no interest in the activity.

Two days later, on a camping trip from Little Langdale to Coniston, the boy sneaked away from the class as the group ate their lunch at Low Tilberthwaite. It was the mid-1980s, roll calls were less *de rigueur* and his absence was only noted as the group headed up the hill after lunch. The boy was found a few hours later by a tourist who was driving through the narrow lanes near Elterwater, six miles away. He was thumbing a lift and according to the tourist, the boy had told him to take him 'Wherever'.

I never saw the boy again. He was taken back to Preston. I remember his teacher saying something about difficulties at home and how the boy would never be invited on a school trip again. In the years that followed that incident, every time I saw a distant rock climber moving with elegant ease across an impossible section I wondered if it was perhaps the boy from Preston, and whether, despite the odds, he had found a route, or perhaps someone had nurtured his talents and made a route for the boy to follow?

I regretted having never pursued the conversation beyond, ‘Why would I?’ But I was young, only four years older than the boy. I didn’t have the experience, knowledge, and power, to trigger the interest and engagement, let alone sustain someone else’s participation in a leisure activity.

I can say this now, writing over thirty years after the event, that the incident with the boy triggered my own interest in people whose careers were formed by experiences and skills developed outside the classroom. That is not to say outside school, but beyond class-based mainstream school curricula. Most of my work colleagues at Quest in the Lake District, and the subsequent outdoor activity centres where I worked in the mid-1980s, had left education with little or no academic achievement. I was often the sole university student from my work. But what my work colleagues all had in common was a hobby/leisure activity, developed in childhood or adolescence, which they had pursued and were now teaching to other young people.

This fascination in a leisure career prompted me to undertake a Masters in Leisure Management. For my dissertation *Working at Leisure* (influenced by my Easter and summer vacation work in outdoor activity centres), I interviewed twelve individuals who had left school without academic qualifications but who were pursuing careers based on their interests. It was easy to find participants for my dissertation, as my Masters’ work placement was at Pineapple Dance Studios in Covent Garden where I was surrounded by performance artists whose careers were either developing, established, or completed.

The conclusions of my Masters’ dissertation suggested that pursuing a meaningful activity can lead to higher levels of well-being and sense of self-identity. Those of us who are able to make our hobby a career, to make an interest a mode of work, are lucky. Perhaps luck does have a role to play, yet discovering a hobby does not, I believe, happen automatically. Persevering to make a living from that hobby involves self-discipline and a complexity of events that are not solely within the command of the individual but are shaped by the world in which the individual is situated.

As I began my PhD, I realised that, whilst my Masters’ dissertation had documented leisure careers, it had not sought to discover how initial participation, interest and henceforward sustained engagement had occurred for my twelve serious leisure participants. I had written an account that had neglected the beginning of the story. What causes an event, and the subsequent sequence of happenings is fundamental. Without a trigger there is no story to tell.

Twenty-five years later I was standing on the playground of a large East Sussex primary school. I had become the school's Behaviour Support Officer, a new post that had been recently created due to the rising number of classroom disturbances, which the school decided they could no longer manage. Part of the role of Behaviour Support Officer was patrolling the playground during break periods. I was surprised that activities such as cartwheeling and handstands were banned from the playground. I had been living for the last two decades in the Pyrenees where I ran a small, family activity centre, close to the Spanish border. Physical exuberance is not banned in French playgrounds – it is encouraged. This aversion to risk fascinated me. I was also struck by the educational inequalities that were never so abundantly visual to me across the Channel. On my way to work in the primary school, I would walk past an elegant private school, which would not look out place in a Harry Potter film and counted each day the ten gleaming minibuses parked beside the school gates ready to transport the already advantaged students to sporting events and places of educational interest. Walking on past the private school, I traversed the town's shopping centre to emerge onto the other side of town. There was a different feel here, fewer boutiques and more charity shops and fast food outlets. In the school where I worked, a red brick Victorian building with a concrete playground deeply hemmed in by the town, 23% of the 450 pupils were in receipt of Free School Meals – one of the UK government measures of disadvantage. The school possessed no minibuses. There were rarely any school trips.

In that journey to work I was reminded of my Lake District days and the private and state school pupils that came along, had a go at the various activities, and went away again. I began to construct a utopian dream where the minibuses from the private schools were suddenly in the ownership of state schools. I imagined the places and activities that the students could visit and do. But the more I thought about this the more I realised the futility in introducing kids to places and activities if they could not revisit and redo. There had to be a continuum, a route to follow. I wondered where the benefit lay in taking children on a one-off 'taster day' or an 'enrichment' outing, as schools increasingly like to call these experiences. Horse riding, for example, an activity that many would naturally enjoy. But what then? Where is the enrichment in providing a one-off 'bolt-on' taster 'enrichment' activity when it cannot be repeated, and nurtured? They become teaser events of what others do. Where is the enrichment in these bolt-on interventions? Without momentum, there is limited value:

'Every experience is a moving force; its value can be judged only on the grounds of what it moves towards and into' (Dewey, 1938).

Back at the primary school where I was working, many of children that were deemed disruptive were either ‘statemented’ (that is, had been issued with a Local Education Authority Statement of Special Educational Needs), had special learning needs, or were in receipt of Free School Meals, and sometimes all three together. The job required the Behaviour Support Officer to help the school ‘reduce the barriers to learning’ for these children. The job was one of diplomacy, being radioed into a classroom to deal with an incident and then persuading the ‘naughty’, ‘disruptive’ child or children to follow me to the *Blue Room*, thus allowing the teacher to get on with the job of teaching. The children usually co-operated; the Blue Room was stuffed with toys and games and so ‘the disruptive ones’ soon learned the strategy of leaving the boring classroom behind and having time out ‘to calm down’ in the Blue Room. The length of this ‘time out’ was dependent on how quickly the child was judged to have calmed down. Calm down too quickly and you would be back in the boring class sooner! Inside the Blue Room my line manager would talk to the ‘naughty child’ about behaviour, self-regulation and thinking about the feelings of others. After a while it was like listening to a record that had stuck. The children had heard this monologue before. It was always the same children returning to the Blue Room and repeatedly the same message given, namely, to think differently about their behaviour. It felt as if the behaviour management in the school was running to stand still. On one such occasion in the Blue Room, whilst waiting for the line manager’s well-rehearsed lecture on social skills to play out, I picked up a folder from one of the shelves. Inside I came across an article about resilience and childhood. So my ecological association with resilience building began. And how schools and extra-curricular activities can build resilience in children experiencing disadvantage and adversity so that they may perform better and begin to defeat the odds that are stacked against them.

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2010, 2019) inequality is the greatest driver in determining life outcomes between richer and poorer pupils. The gap in attainment between the poorest children and children from better-off backgrounds is already large at age 5 and this gap widens particularly fast during the primary school years. By age 11, only around three quarters of children from the poorest fifth of families reach the government’s expected level at Key Stage 2, compared to 97% of children from the richest fifth (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2010).

Poverty is the greatest contributor to negative impacts. The negative impacts of poverty on children start before birth and accumulate across life (Health Scotland, 2018).

Poverty has negative impacts on children's health, their social, emotional and cognitive development, and behaviour and educational outcomes. Higher rates of exclusions are seen in areas of high deprivation (Public Health England, 2018). Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) are four times more likely to receive a fixed term school exclusion of more than two days. Persistent disruptive behaviour is the most common reason for both permanent and fixed-period exclusions overall.

The cumulative effects of poverty placing strain on families, can lead to parental mental health and relationship problems, financial problems and substance misuse. Mental illness is closely associated with many forms of inequalities (Gov.uk, 2018). One in six of adults have a common mental health disorder, such as anxiety (Public Health England, 2018). Three quarters of mental health problems are established by the age of 24. Together with substance misuse, mental illness accounts for 21.3% of the total morbidity burden in England. Mental illness is closely associated with many forms of inequalities, which people living with severe mental illness are particularly vulnerable to experiencing. Recent data indicates that there are close to 551,000 people in England with more severe mental illness, such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder (Public Health England, 2018). Poor parental mental health can have a negative impact on parenting behaviours, which in turn impact the mental health and outcomes of their children.

The cumulative effects of poverty are cyclical with a strong likelihood of disadvantaged children becoming disadvantaged parents with their own children experiencing poverty (Harvey, 2020). Children and young people with parents who have lower educational attainment are less likely to do well at school than their peers with better-educated parents. Educational attainment influences employment opportunities and income in adulthood. People with lower levels of education are less likely to have access to resources important for health, such as social support, a healthy physical environment and warm, safe housing. Poor educational attainment has been linked with increased rates of death and illness in adults for a wide range of health conditions (Health Scotland, 2019).

The effects of poverty are cumulative upon schools. The socio-economic background of the school intake is shaped by the affluence of the school catchment area. In general, schools with larger proportions of disadvantaged children and young people tend to have lower levels of attainment overall. In the PISA 2012 survey, on average across all the OECD countries taking part, a young person attending a disadvantaged school was 11 times more likely to be a low performer than a pupil attending an advantaged school (Health Scotland,

2019). In the UK families on low incomes are four times more likely to send their child to a struggling primary school than wealthier families (Localgov.co.uk, 2016).

However, many children and young people living in disadvantaged circumstances do well. It is important to understand how these children beat the cumulative odds that are stacked against them. Certainly, the quality of the social and physical environments that they experience and inhabit are key to this success. A combination and accumulation of these experiences can enhance or hinder a child's educational outcomes. Beyond the home the place within a child's ecology where they spend most time is school. So, school experiences play a powerful role in shaping a child's development. School experiences may counter, alleviate or accentuate home experiences. Where home life is tough, school has the possibility of becoming a source of relief from the effects of disadvantage and adversity; an arena in which the child may experience success.

Resilience is most frequently described as 'the ability to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges, strengthened and more resourceful' (Walsh, 2008) or the 'positive development despite adversity' (Luthar and Zelazo, 2003). The idea of resilience is a useful concept with which to examine how a child might withstand or be alleviated from the effects of disadvantage and adversity. Resilience as a 'positive development despite adversity' (Luthar and Zelazo, 2003). (Luthar and Zelazo, 2003). nevertheless requires a focus on the factors that cause this development. So 'the ability to withstand or rebound' (Walsh, 2008) should not be considered only an outcome without careful consideration of the processes that led to this outcome. A process focussed approach to success stories enables the researcher to suggest what schools could do to improve the experience for their more disadvantaged pupils. I was already beginning to seriously question many initiatives, for example, whether routes to better educational outcomes and life chances could be achieved through 'enrichment' 'taster days' and whether adults instructing children on how to behave actually worked to change behaviour. The, 'You should think about your actions' and 'You should think about the feelings of others' approach seemed ineffectual and at worst, meaningless. It certainly didn't appear to be working as an intervention. It seemed to be self-perpetuating. I was cajoling the same children each day into the Blue Room. It was like Groundhog Day. I became increasingly disillusioned by what I now understand to be called 'behavioural and cognitive interventions' employed by schools to improve life skills of those children deemed most in need. What it seemed was missing from all of these interventions was *activity*, the ability to *engage* with the child in ways that were meaningful and long-term. Rather than preaching about ways to behave, mindset, attitudes and feelings, what if schools could encourage an



activity that the child enjoyed? Would this activity engagement, rather than a lecture on behaviour, have positive repercussions for the child?

It was during this time of frustration at work that, through my investigations, the University of Brighton presented itself as a possible route forward for such children. I discovered a hub of resilience excellence, and so I applied to become a PhD student under the guidance of Professor Angie Hart. I was now immersed into the rigours of doctoral research, tasked to identify a gap in knowledge and then to convince my supervisors and doctoral college that the gap identified was worthy of exploration.

Initially I was interested in exploring outdoor education. The growth and increasing popularity of forestry schools seemed a relevant starting point. However, through guidance from my senior supervisor Professor Angie Hart I began broadening my potential field of analysis to look at ‘hobbies’ and interests more generally. From hobbies I was reminded of my Master’s dissertation which had investigated the lives of twelve adults who had left school with few or no academic qualifications, but who had built their careers upon their hobbies. My Master’s thesis had documented these adult lives when their careers were already developed. Now I realised that I wanted to investigate how interest in an activity begins and is sustained, such that the activity is not abandoned but pursued. When a child is introduced to an activity, at what point can we say that the child is interested in that particular activity?

So, I was drawn to researching the birth of leisure interest. I was encouraged by Professor Hart to interview adults in schools who ran after-school clubs. I was aware that adults might play a crucial role in forming a child’s interest and that this would be driven equally by opportunity to participate, to which adults were the gate keepers. Focussing upon my own observances of behaviour being taught and the question of whether activity would be a better route to behaviour transformation in school, I wanted to focus upon the role of extra-curricular activities (ECA). I began to wonder whether the term ‘interest’ was best suited to conditions surrounding a child’s initial participation in ECA. If the child was introduced to the activity and did not express an interest, then we can say that the child was only participating in the activity. Equally, a child could be interested in an activity but unable to participate, through lack of opportunities and resources. As my research progressed, so the term *engagement* seemed to embrace both opportunity and choice. Engagement suggests both an invitation to participate, which includes a mechanism or process that performs the engaging, and an acceptance by the individual being invited to engage. Engagement also hints at a relational process between the teacher and the learner. To engage with something

requires not only the chance/opportunity but also the choice to participate. Engagement turns the spotlight not only upon those being engaged but the gate keepers to the activity within the school context in which the field of ECA is situated.

I wanted to understand the processes that trigger and sustain extra-curricular activity (ECA) for children in *middle childhood*; that is to say, the last three years of primary school (Key Stage 2, ages 8 -11). This interest was fuelled by the comprehensive canon of literature that stressed the advantages of ECA engagement for children and young people (Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity & Payne, 2013; Fredricks & Eccles, 2008). Research also indicated that ECA was particularly beneficial to disadvantaged children and could also improve their academic outcomes (Chanfreau et al., 2016, Morris, 2015). There was also evidence to suggest that this engagement peaked at eleven years and then declined during adolescence (Fletcher, Nickerson & Wright, 2003; Wang & Eccles 2012; Zimmermann-Sloutskis, Wanner, Zimmermann, & Martin, 2010). A child who had never participated in an ECA in primary school was most likely, once transitioned to secondary school, never to participate in an ECA throughout their schooling (Aumètre & Poulin 2015; Fletcher et al., 2003). Extracurricular activity participation is all the more important in early school years, because children who participate in activities during middle childhood are more likely to continue to do so during adolescence than children who begin in adolescence (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2014; Simpkins, Fredricks, Davis-Kean & Eccles, 2006). Middle childhood is a developmental period in which a child becomes aware of their (burgeoning) abilities and aptitudes vis-à-vis their peers (Erikson, 1963). This gives middle childhood eminence in the early trajectory of identity and efficacy. Given the decline in ECA in adolescence this also makes middle childhood an optimum developmental stage to commence a child's school ECA pathway. Whilst the benefits of ECA engagement were well documented there appeared a lack of studies to indicate how initial ECA was triggered in middle childhood. I wanted to explore how this ECA route began, especially for disadvantaged children in middle childhood who had never previously participated in an ECA. My aim was to explain how ECA was triggered and then sustained for a disadvantaged child in middle childhood and to explore whether this ECA engagement could be considered a route to resilience. The lens of this explanation would be focussed on the processes, the route of ECA engagement in order to better understand the resilient outcome or response of the child. Beyond this initial engagement, I also wanted to document how ECA was sustained for each child because research had revealed that the benefits of the ECA engagement were directly linked to the duration of the child's activity participation (Bohnert, Fredricks & Randall, 2010).

In my quest to explain the processes necessary for triggering and sustaining ECA engagement in middle childhood, my supervisors advised me to document twenty accounts of successful ECA engagement of disadvantaged children in middle childhood, as told through interviews by the practitioners who ran the twenty school clubs in the various schools that feature in this thesis. I was unsure how disadvantage could be measured and decided on the governmental indication of disadvantage: the allocation of Free School Meals (FSM). A child may be eligible for FSM if their parents/carers receive the following:

- income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- the guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Working Tax Credit run-on, paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit

Universal Credit; if you apply on or after 1 April 2018 your household income must be less than £7,400 a year (after tax and not including any benefits you get) (Free School Meals, UK Gov, 2018).

As previously discussed, the cumulative impact of poverty stacks the odds against a pupil who is eligible for FSM leaving school with life enhancing grades and experiences. However, FSM is not indicative of disadvantage, nor does it perfectly capture poverty (The Times Educational Supplement, 2014). Many children in receipt of FSM come from caring, functioning and happy families and experience no adversity. For this thesis I wanted to explore the benefit of ECA for children who faced disadvantage and adversity. I used FSM purely as a gateway into possible hardship and poverty. However, adversity might also be represented by learning barriers of mental or physical impairment. So adversity might be represented by socio-economic factors and special educational needs. It was unknown what adversity would be presented in these stories. There might materialise an array of barriers to learning from the cumulative effects of poverty, as well as physiological and mental constraints. What was important is the correlation of these accounts of successful ECA engagement for children who were disadvantaged. The notion of a child facing adversity and resilience allows us to look at ways of combatting, resisting and perhaps even defeating these

cumulative adversarial effects of poverty. It seemed to me that it might be worthwhile assembling stories of resilience building that appeared to counteract the adversarial effects of childhood disadvantage. I wanted to investigate and understand to what extent ECA could be considered a route to resilience in middle childhood. This route to resilience would be measured by whether the practitioner structuring the ECA perceived that a disadvantaged child facing adversity was performing/functioning better for having engaged in an extended period (at least six months) of ECA. In this way the ECA engagement was a route to resilience, from which a disadvantaged child - that is to say in receipt of FSM and facing adversity had benefitted and was now displaying positive behaviour that had not been manifested before the ECA. I wanted to provide insight into how these resilience outcomes are garnered within a child. This allowed me to examine the notion of resilience as the route along the child was guided which led to resilient outcomes of the child performing better in school. This is a dynamic process between child and environment, the emergent outcome cannot be analysed without an understanding of the journey.

Accounts of success, however small, within the broad context of a child's ecology, are worth exploring in order to understand and explain how this success was achieved. If we can understand why some children who are exposed to adversity and, therefore, vulnerable to poor outcomes benefit from success in certain domains then we have important clues about how to transfer these positive experiences to wider numbers of children who frequently succumb to the damaging effects of adversity. Whilst it is commonly agreed that resilience is a measure of successful adaption or response to adversity, differences remain as to how individual resilience is achieved. To what extent can the level of successful coping that a child demonstrates be purely a result of personal traits? To what extent do environmental factors facilitate or hinder a child's adaptation to adverse circumstances? An important factor in the process of building resilience might be practitioner practice. I wanted to discover what practices worked in forming and driving interest in childhood. I was aided in this quest by implementing The Resilience Framework (Boingboing, 2019) into my method of data collection. The Resilience Framework was devised by my senior supervisor, Professor Hart and colleagues, as a tool to help practitioners in schools identify and adopt everyday practices in which to bolster a child or young person's resilience. I discuss in greater detail The Resilience Framework in **Chapter 4**, Methodology and in **Chapter 5**, Findings.

With support from my supervisors, we decided that the best method to document both the triggering and sustaining processes underlying a child's ECA engagement in a school context was to interview the practitioners who ran the ECAs. Each interview would be an

account of how a child in receipt of FSM had, in middle childhood, begun participating in an ECA and had sustained this participation for at least six months within the last academic calendar. Professor Hart insisted that the accounts should be recent to be relatively fresh in the practitioners' memories and to avoid any historic bias. Beyond receipt of FSM, the child would also be identified, by the school, as experiencing adversity. This adversity would possibly affect the child's school attendance and their overall school performance. Increasingly in the UK, education professionals are reporting a significant upsurge in the visibility of pupil poverty in their school/college and providing many distressing examples from daily life (National Education Union, 2019). The adversity of poverty and adversity is driving the divide between disadvantaged and affluent pupils when it comes to educational outcomes (Boing-boing, 2017).

It is important to understand and explain the process of resilience building through ECA engagement to evaluate how this may counteract against the effects of adversity. As well as discovering how ECA participation was triggered and sustained for at least six months, I also wanted to discover the practitioners' perceptions of the benefits to the child after this sustained period of ECA engagement and whether they would consider these benefits *resilience*.

In this resilience debate between the interplay of individual qualities and external factors I analysed four theories of interest: Expectancy-Value theory (EVT) (Eccles 2004; Wigfield et al., 2015), Self-Regulation theory (SRT) (Dweck, 2017; Zimmerman, 2000), Self Determination theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2013) and Co-Regulation theory (CRT) (McCaslin, 2004, 2009). The two theories, EVT and SRT, feature within the literature and recommendations of educational bodies, such as the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and The Social Mobility Commission (SMC) and they focus upon individual attributes or desired outcomes of learning. In this respect, EVT and SRT are situated towards the individual or internal measure of resilience as a trait or desired quality of a student. EVT and SRT are strong on descriptions of the desired destination of the student route. In contrast, SDT and CRT recognise that student qualities and outcomes are shaped by practice and are concerned with pedagogic processes and conditions that enhance student performance. In resilience theory, SDT and CRT focus more upon the route. In the resilience debate, SDT and CRT are positioned more towards considering external factors in influencing an individual's adaptation to adversity. Both the journey (SDT and CRT) and the destination (EVT and SRT) are important in resilience research. Surely one cannot exist without the other, the destination orients the route, yet without the route there is no

destination. In the light of my findings I wanted to evaluate how these four interest theories might contribute to explaining the events highlighted in the practitioner interviews.

The findings from these twenty interviews would allow me to review and potentially challenge the current recommended educational programmes designed to address the needs of disadvantaged pupils in UK. These programmes are increasingly focussed upon pupil character. Yet within this focus upon character formation as effective in bridging the attainment gap between richer and poorer pupils, there is also an acknowledgement by the EEF and SMC that little is known about how character is formed and whether it can be taught – questioning the former Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan’s claim that Britain would become the world leader in teaching character and resilience (DfE 2015).

The thesis consists of nine chapters. This introductory **Chapter 1** has set out the germination of my engagement into investigating the domain of ECA to provide routes to success and resilience in middle childhood for disadvantaged children. **Chapter 2** documents my review of the relevant literature surrounding middle childhood, ECA, interest theory, engagement, resilience, the school context and practitioner practice. In **Chapter 3**, I document and comment upon UK educational policy and recommendations since 2010. **Chapter 2** and **Chapter 3** represent a rigorous iterative process, constantly revisited and ongoing, even throughout the process of writing the thesis between the months of March and November 2019. During the five-year process of completing this thesis, which began in the autumn 2014, the UK has experienced three Prime Ministers and four Secretary of States for Education. The writing of this final edited thesis took place on the cusp of another General Election on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2019. It has been a turbulent and often chaotic political period in which education, along with other sectors of everyday life such as health and care have been side-lined by the debate over Brexit. In this period, I have subscribed to newsletters and updates circulated by institutions and bodies concerned with UK education and in particular, with the outcomes of poorer, less advantaged pupils. These associations were: The Sutton Trust, The Social Mobility Commission (SMC), The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), the Department of Education, the Education Policy Institute. Chapter 3 concludes with identifying a gap in the knowledge worth exploring: whilst we know of the benefits of children and young people participating in ECA, we know much less how engagement begins in ECA and how this initial engagement is sustained for these benefits to establish. If we are able to identify conditions and processes that generate ECA engagement, especially for disadvantaged students who have never participated in ECA, then we can establish what

needs to be in place for schools to promote successful ECA engagement to children who would benefit.

In **Chapter 4**, I present my aims and explain my Methodology of this thesis - to provide theoretical explanations for first-hand practitioner accounts and to understand what drives or generates the events told in the accounts. If we can better understand what causes an event to take place, we are in a better position to know what needs to be in place to optimise the tendency for similar events to take place in the future. In Chapter 4, I also present my method, which was a semi-structured interview with twenty practitioners to highlight the events and processes of triggering and sustaining ECA for a child in receipt of a FSM in middle childhood facing adversity. These interviews would then undergo a thematic analysis to search for themes/commonalities that these stories of successful ECA engagement for a disadvantaged child share.

The **Chapter 5**, I present the findings and identify the themes/commonalities in the twenty accounts that are relevant to the research aims of discovering the processes of triggering sustaining ECA engagement in middle childhood and what needs to be in place to promote similar experiences for children.

**Chapter 6** offers a theoretical explanation to the findings presented in **Chapter 5**. It addresses the first research aim:

- To explain how extra-curricular engagement is triggered and sustained for disadvantaged children in middle childhood.

Chapter 6 uncovers and suggests proximal processes beneath the surface descriptions of the interviews that may have contributed to generating the events of successful ECA engagement. In the light of these proposed theoretical explanations, **Chapter 7** revisits the four interest theories described in Chapter 2 to see how they can each explain the events of the twenty stories featured in this thesis.

**Chapter 7** proposes an engagement model or process, rather than an explanation based on interest. This chapter also maps the Educational Endowment Fund's Toolkit for schools onto the findings and commonalities and argues that extra-curricular activities are misunderstood and undervalued by the current toolkit. The strengths and limitations of this thesis are presented at the end of this chapter along with proposals for areas of future research suggested by my findings.

**Chapter 8** presents what needs to be in place to provide the best chance of replicating successful ECA engagement in middle childhood for disadvantaged children who have never previously participated in ECA. This chapter addresses the second research aim of this thesis:

- To gain insight into what is needed for extra-curricular activities to be a resilience building process.

In **Chapter 9**, I present my conclusion. I end this final chapter imagining the boy from Preston responding to the processes uncovered in this thesis and the life changing possibilities that might emerge.



## Chapter 2. Literature Review

In this chapter I review the relevant literature on the developmental significance of middle childhood and the importance of ECA engagement for both children and adolescents. I propose that middle childhood is a particularly good stage in a child's development to begin ECA engagement. This chapter also explores four interest theories to better understand how interest is formed in childhood. I propose that the term 'engagement' is more useful than 'interest' in explaining the construction of interest. For a child being introduced to an activity for the first time, engagement implies a process between the individual introducing the activity and the child who is being introduced and subsequently participating. Interest becomes the outcome of this process of successful engagement. This chapter also examines the notion of resilience. Like engagement, resilience is a dynamic process between child and environment, the outcome cannot be analysed without an understanding of the journey.

I began my literature review in 2015 by entering the on-line University of Brighton library service and chose Education amongst the All Subject Guides. This gave me access to the following online subject-specific electronic databases:

- Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC),
- British Education Index (BEI),
- PyschINFO,
- Child Development and Adolescent Studies,
- *Education Abstracts*,
- Intered,
- Sage Journals Online, Teacher Reference Center,
- Web of Science.
- Scopus – University of Brighton literature search engine.

I chose to consult only peer reviewed journals published in English. I was reluctant to enter an exclusion date that would block important and seminal work on theory. The following key words were used:

extra-curricular activit\*, after-school club\*, middle childhood, Key Stage 2, interest, motivation, engagement, resilience.

I applied an advanced search using Boolean logic of AND/OR. Principally I searched for combinations of the keywords within the title or abstract, but on occasions I also applied the keyword/terms and their combinations throughout the paper. Consulting article abstracts

provided an efficient means of identifying the article's relevance. I adopted a narrative literature review method which "seeks to identify what has been accomplished previously, allowing for consolidation, for building on previous work, for summation, for avoiding duplication and for identifying omissions or gaps." (Grant & Booth, 2009, p.97).

## **2.1 Middle Childhood**

Middle childhood is an important developmental period in the formation of a child's emerging identity. It was Erikson (1963) in proposing the 'eight stages of man' who first stressed the importance of middle childhood as a time when children move from the overarching dominance of home into the wider social contexts of school and neighbourhood. School and neighbourhood increasingly influence the child's development over time. Erikson viewed the years between seven and 11 as the time when children should develop what he called a 'sense of industry' and learn to cooperate with their peers and adults. Erikson also characterised middle childhood as a time of struggle between competency and inferiority. Middle childhood presents the beginnings of a child's awareness of their capability. Middle childhood is the dawn of one's impression of competency versus inferiority vis-a-vis our peers, the onset of beliefs about our ability and the potential for the onset of what has been termed 'learned helplessness' through repeated failure (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Seligman, 1975). Erikson recognised the significance of unresolved feelings of inadequacy and inferiority among our peers and that they can lead to serious problems in competency and self-esteem. Repeated failure at school is particularly pertinent for socially disadvantaged children who are more likely to underperform at school than non-disadvantaged pupils (Downey & Condrón, 2016; Downey, Yoon & Martin, 2018)

The involvement in formal schooling and organised activities that begins during middle childhood years introduces children to new social roles in which they earn social status based upon their competence and performance. Erikson (1963) believed that children who do not master the skills required in these new settings are likely to develop a 'sense of inferiority,' which can lead, in turn, to intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal consequences. Skinner (1990) found that beliefs about ability did not emerge as predictors of performance until about age 11 or 12. Erikson's 'sense of inferiority' resonates with Seligman's later notion of 'learned helplessness' (Abramson and Seligman, 1978; Seligman,

1975; Seligman, Maier, & Geer, 1979), whereby repeated cycles of failure in one field, such as in the classroom, may lead to the development of an expectancy to perform poorly in this and in other fields. Researchers have confirmed Erikson's notion that feelings of competence and personal esteem are of central importance for a child's well-being in middle childhood (Eccles et al., 1998; Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2014; Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, Guhn, Zumbo & Hertzman, 2014). Chazan, Laing and Davies (2014) suggested that middle childhood is a time when children begin to work towards achieving a sense of competence and in doing so become aware of their competences vis-à-vis their peers.

Metsäpelto and Pulkkinen (2014) found that extracurricular activities organised as part of the integrated day benefitted children's socioemotional development and school achievement. The authors identified middle childhood as an important time for laying the foundations for these mastery skills and the related formation of identity and self-esteem.

With competency so develops an awareness of identity. Middle childhood represents a developmental period that is critical for the development of identity and self-efficacy (Eccles, 1999; Guhn et al., 2013). Mental disorders and psychological dysfunction commonly emerge during this period (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Kessler et al., 2005), and these may lead to heightened risk and problem behaviours during adolescence and into adulthood.

A number of protective factors are associated with children's well-being and developmental health during middle childhood: positive social relationships with adults and peers are strongly associated with children's resilience, wellbeing, health, and competence (Clark, Durbin, Hicks, Iacono & McGue, 2016; Luthar 2015). Skinner and Zimmer-Gembeck (2016) associated middle childhood with resilience building and suggested that coping strategies start to be employed and recognised. In middle childhood children begin to reappraise stressful events in ways that shape their emotional reactions and coping choices. They start to differentiate and deploy a wider range of ways of coping, including a host of mental functions. These mental functions are incorporated in problem-solving and emotion regulation, leading to improvements or hindrances in a child's ability to identify, negotiate, and enact constructive solutions.

But we should not assume that these mental functions are self-generating. They require experiences and pedagogic guidance to be embedded. According to Waenerlund and colleagues (2016), these newly founded coping experiences, when supported by caring adults, contribute to the development of pragmatic and constructive self-systems that will assist by functioning as anchors in future attempts to deal with obstacles and problems. A major task of the supportive adult at this middle childhood stage is to help children spend time in a zone

of ‘just manageable challenge’, where tasks are both challenging but controllable (Waenerlund et al., 2016). Such experiences promote stress resilience, but creating this zone is a moving target, requiring continual readjustment to keep tipping children away from experiences of threat and toward experiences of challenge (Vygotsky, 1987; Wertsch, 1984;).

The benefits of a good school experience may be long lasting. Experiences within a child’s life tend to influence the trajectory of what happens next (Daly and Gilligan, 2013). Embedding these good experiences at an early age would seem to be highly beneficial. These experiences influence cognitive performance, self-esteem and self-efficacy (Hattie, 2012, Rutter, 1991; Smith, 2006;). The embedding of positive school experiences in middle childhood may well be beneficial in countering what Wang and Eccles (2012) in their US based study identified a decline in school engagement after the age of 11 with a corresponding decline in ECA participation. By the time children reached age 11, boys participated less in ECA than girls. The authors found no racial or ethnic differences in the decline of ECA over time. The effect of social support on ECA was the main variable determining continued participation. Adolescents were more likely to participate in extracurricular activities when they experienced increased support from their peers and parents from seventh through to 11th grades (Wang & Eccles, 2012). Thus, having social support from these sources protects against the normative decline in ECA participation.

ECA participation is all the more important in early school years, because children who participate in activities during middle childhood are more likely to continue to do so during adolescence (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2014; Simpkins, Fredricks, Davis-Kean & Eccles, 2006). Reflecting the ecology of middle childhood Oberle et al. (2014) examined the role of supportive adults to the emotional well-being of 9-year-olds attending public schools in Vancouver, Canada. The authors noted that, whereas the importance of adult support has been well-documented across adolescence, less is known about its importance with respect to fostering positive development in middle childhood. The authors discovered that practitioner support in the school was considered the most significant by 9-year-old children and was less significant in adolescence. They concluded that school is a critical developmental context in middle childhood because it can be an important source of connectedness and belonging emerging from positive and supportive relationships with teachers, staff members and peers.

However I would suggest that middle childhood might provide the optimal stage to incorporate routes to competency for a child to tackle the onset of ‘a sense of inferiority’ (Erickson, 1963), or ‘learned helplessness’ (Abramson and Seligman, 1978; Seligman, 1975; Seligman, Maier, & Geer, 1979). These routes to competency providing the foundations of

mastery, self-esteem, emerging identity may well build levels of perseverance and resilience to defeat the odds of disadvantage pushing a child into repeated cycles of failure.

## **2.2 Extra-Curricular Activity**

Extra-curricular activity (ECA) can be defined as undertakings that students participate in, that are removed from prescribed education related activities, ‘such as hobbies, social groups, sporting, cultural or religious activities and voluntary or paid work’ (Thompson, Clark, Walker, & Whyatt, 2013 p. 136). Whilst ECA can be organised activity both in and outside school, for the purposes of this thesis, ECA is considered within the school context only. Nevertheless, it is important to examine the literature on ECA for both school and outside school contexts to better understand the overall benefits of ECA that schools can then employ in their own settings. For socially disadvantaged pupils, school may provide the only route to ECA engagement.

A UK report, ‘An Unequal Playing Field’, (Gov.uk. 2019a) which concentrated upon secondary schools, discovered ‘huge disparities in children’s participation rates across a wide range of extra-curricular activities depending on their social background’. Pupils aged 10 to 15 from wealthier families were found to be much more likely to take part in every type of activity, especially music and sport. Children from the poorest backgrounds were three times more likely to not take part in extra-curricular activities compared to those from the wealthiest backgrounds.

The Social Mobility Commission (Gov.uk., 2019b) found that that across Years 1-13, 55% of pupils participated in at least three hours of PE and out of hours school sport. The percentage of pupils taking part in at least three hours of PE and out of hours school sport increased across primary school and decreased across secondary school. The schools with the highest level of participation pe, i.e. over 70% of pupils participated in three hours of PE and out of hours school sport, had fewer pupils who were eligible for FSM than in schools where there were lower levels, i.e. 40% or less of pupils participating in three hours of PE and out of hours school sport.

According to UK government figures, 81% of 11-18-year-olds take part in at least one regular activity either in or outside of school. This government figure strongly contrasts with a polling in 2017 by the Sutton Trust, which found that 37% of secondary pupils do nothing except their formal academic studies in school, engaging in no clubs or activities whatsoever

(The Sutton Trust, 2017). This suggests that many pupils in Secondary schools participate in activities that take place outside their school.

The Sutton Trust comment that this low participation rate is despite most schools emphasising that they offer ‘volunteering, debating and other activities to develop the skills coveted by employers’. For example, 45 schools in the Sutton Trust poll said that they provided debating clubs, but the Sutton Trust found that only 2% of pupils reported participating. The poorest pupils were found to be the least likely to take up activities. This was partly because schools with more FSM pupils provide fewer activities. Seventy percent of schools with the lowest proportions of pupils on FSM offered debating clubs, in contrast to 35% of schools with the highest number of FSM pupils (The Sutton Trust, 2014).

In addition, the Sutton Trust (2014) also commissioned an online poll of parents/carers in England to investigate rates of ECA participation, both in and outside school, for children aged 5-16. This poll found that 76% of parents/carers reported that their child regularly participated in some form of ECA within the last 12 months. Sport/Exercise was the most popular activity (52%), followed by Scouts/Guiding (16%), dance/drama (15%) and music (14%). However, there was a difference in participation between social groups, with rates around 15 percentage points higher for pupils of parents/carers in social groups A, B, or C1 (84%) than among parents in social groups C2, D, or E (69%). There were also differences in participation depending on level of education of parents/carers, with 83% of parents with a degree level education or higher reporting that their child participated in ECA, compared with 72% of parents/carers without a degree (The Sutton Trust, 2014).

The school curriculum in England does not specify that schools should provide ECA. The consensus of definitions state that ECA falls outside the realm of the normal curriculum. However, it could be argued that the prefix ‘extra’ suggests a supplement, or furthering, to the curriculum. The greatest clarity on what primary schools are required to include in their curriculum is stipulated in the following two clauses from the National Curriculum in England by The Department of Education (2013a):

‘2.1 Every state-funded school must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based and which: promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

2.5 All schools should make provision for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), drawing on good practice. Schools are also free to include other subjects or topics of their choice in planning and designing their own programme of education.’

Only two activities often associated with extra-curricular are in fact part of the national curriculum and, therefore, primary schools are obliged to teach each child:

Music:

- 1) ‘A high quality music education should engage and inspire pupils to develop a love of music and their talent as musicians, and so increase their self-confidence, creativity and sense of achievement... Key stage 2 Pupils should be taught to sing and play musically with increasing confidence and control.’ (The Department of Education, 2013)

Physical Education:

- 2) ‘A high-quality physical education curriculum inspires all pupils to succeed and excel in competitive sport and other physically-demanding activities... Key stage 2 Pupils should continue to apply and develop a broader range of skills, learning how to use them in different ways and to link them to make actions and sequences of movement. They should enjoy communicating, collaborating and competing with each other.’ (Department of Education, 2013).

I sought clarification on the provision of ECA for schools by contacting the Department of Education and received the following explanation (March 2019) from the Ministerial and Public Communications Division, which in summary, says that Education policy is somewhat nebulous on school ECA provision.

‘I can say that schools are able to offer any extracurricular activities they wish according to the needs and interests of their pupils. However, it is for the schools themselves to ensure that they have adequate teaching and resourcing available in order to run such activities effectively. Schools are also able to contact any individual, group or resource they feel may be suitable to assist them in the delivery of such activities.’

### **2.2.1 The Impact of Extra-Curricular Activity**

The known outcomes of children participating in ECA are well documented. In this section I examine the beneficial outcomes in general for children and adolescents. There is also research that links ECA to academic benefits. Finally, this section will document evidence to suggest that ECA may be especially beneficial to socially disadvantaged pupils.

ECA literature provides a rich account of the beneficial outcomes for children and young people and this was consistent across studies in the western world. However, my literature review unveiled a prominence of studies from the USA and Canada, which may indicate an increased awareness of the benefits of ECA in North America. There are general benefits of ECA engagement for the behaviour of all pupils (Howrie et al., 2010; Metsapelto and Pulkkinen, 2012) and personal development (Byrne 2016, Hansen, Larson & Dworkin, 2003). Howie et al. (2010) reported that children participating in both sporting and non-sporting clubs had higher social skill scores compared with children who did not participate in any outside-school activity. Extracurricular settings are considered as important contexts for development, and a youth's transactions within these settings (for example, interacting with peers and adult leaders, following rules and routines, setting and monitoring performance goals, and confronting and overcoming challenges) are considered proximal drivers of development (Fredricks and Simpkins, 2013). Further benefits associated with ECA include children enjoying exploration, having confidence and discipline, performing well academically (Eime et al., 2013). Similarly, Bartko and Eccles (2003) reported that 'structured activities' led to higher positive functioning for participants. Linver, Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2009) found that less positive developmental outcomes associated with young people who did not participate in sport and other organised activities. Bohnert and colleagues (2010) found a correlation between the length of ECA participation, both sporting and non-sporting, and the benefits accrued; two years of ECA participation yields more benefits than participation for one year and that additional years of participation beyond two may provide further benefits.

Research informs us that sport plays a role in psycho-social well-being, as well as the promotion of positive health behaviours among children and young people (Amnesi et al., 2007; Gore et al., 2001; Fredricks and Eccles, 2008). Sports participation is associated with perceptions of competence (Eime et al., 2013; McCarthy, Jones & Clark-Carter, 2008), higher self-esteem (Findlay & Coplan, 2008; Marsh and Kleitman, 2003). Eime and colleagues (2013) looked at the social and psychological benefits for children and adolescents



in sport participation. Several psychological and social health benefits were reported, with the most commonly cited being improved self-esteem.

Sport participation has been associated with positive mood states, emotional control and social adequacy (Griffiths, Dowda, Dezaux, & Pate 2010; Marsh and Kleitman, 2003), and enhanced social functioning (Bourassa et al., 2017; Griffiths et al., 2010; Snyder et al., 2010). Sports participation is also associated with reduced psychological and social difficulties, including the experience of anxiety (Smith, Smoll & Cumming, 2007) and countering depressed mood (Gore et al., 2001; Kremer et al., 2014).

In a study in Canada, Denault and Poulin (2009) found that boys and girls were equally likely to participate in extracurricular activities in early adolescence; boys were more likely to participate in sports, whereas girls were more likely to participate in performance and fine arts. Sports participation predicted competence beliefs and educational value, whereas participation in performance arts/clubs predicted competence beliefs, teacher-rated classroom engagement, and teacher-awarded Extracurricular Participation grades. The finding that both activity domains predicted an increase in academic competence beliefs suggests that ECA provides a context in which students can meet and overcome challenges and increase competencies, thereby building confidence (Denault & Poulin, 2009).

In another Canadian study, Holt and colleagues (2002) examined the perceptions of low-income parents and their children of the benefits associated with participation in youth sport and also parents' perceptions of the challenges associated with providing their children sporting opportunities. Thirty-five interviews were conducted with parents and children from 17 low income families. Parents and children reported that sport participation was associated with positive relationships with coaches, making new friends, and developing teamwork and social skills. Parents reported barriers that included finances and transport, which both restricted the extent to which their children could engage in sport and gain sustained developmental benefits.

Improved academic outcomes have also been linked ECA and especially so to socially disadvantaged pupils. Chanfreau and colleagues (2016) suggested that there were academic benefits for children's Key Stage 2 academic attainment (English and Maths) in the UK from participating in ECA, such as breakfast clubs, after-school clubs, sports activities, music and art lessons. Participation in sports clubs and 'other' ECA was positively associated with attainment outcomes at age 11. The report also investigated social, emotional and behavioural outcomes using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and found that participating in organised sports was also positively linked to social, emotional and

behavioural outcomes. These benefits were especially linked to disadvantaged children. Among economically disadvantaged children, after-school clubs emerged as the only organised activity associated with both higher Key Stage 2 attainment and prosocial skills. One key aim of this study was to investigate whether ECA might play a role in closing the academic attainment gap between children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and other more financially assured children. The findings showed that disadvantaged children who had never previously attended an after-school club showed the greatest improvements in academic attainment. Attending an after-school club was not significantly related to progress among the non-disadvantaged, but it was positively related to progress among disadvantaged children. The authors conclude that ‘more research is needed to understand the content of the after-school clubs and what it is about the experience that results in improved outcomes’ (Chanfreau et al, 2016, p. ii). This would appear to indicate the resilience-building potential of ECA for disadvantaged children through offering additional routes to competency and associated improved levels self-esteem, thereby defeating the odds of disadvantage that has a strong tendency to direct a child into repeated cycles of failure.

The findings of Chanfreau et al. (2016) confirm earlier findings from Morris (2015) and Nelson (2016). Morris recognised that, whilst the benefits of ECA are known, little was understood about how particular aspects of ECA affect the academic achievement of high school students from different social class positions. Morris concluded that the extra benefit provided disadvantaged students with a form of resource compensation that helps to reduce the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students. For Morris, this supports the ‘resource compensation’ perspective that increased participation in ECA provides access to the resources that disadvantaged children and young people often go without, such as: ‘constructive mental challenges, advantageous communication patterns, safe and dependable recreation space, and expanding social networks populated with driven youths and socially influential nonfamilial adults’ (p.286). Exposure to these previously unavailable resources provides beneficial compensation for young people but less so for their more advantaged peers who have experienced these resources since birth (Morris, 2015).

Similarly, Gilligan (2007) sees the link between committed adults in ECA and educational progress for children in care. There is evidence that such ‘connectedness to nonparental adults’ may offer adolescents the prospects of ‘better outcomes in terms of scholastic success, social-emotional wellbeing, connections to social capital’ (page 93). Gilligan suggests that ‘spare time activities’ may be more likely to generate educational benefit with disadvantaged young people because they are different from schooling.

The conclusions from Chanfreau et al. (2016), Morris (2015) and Gilligan (2007) present a number of implications for policy makers and practitioners concerned with educational outcomes, and the effective use of Pupil Premium funding. For children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds who have lower ECA participation rates, school-based clubs offer an accessible route for learning experiences with the potential benefits for social as well as academic development. Chanfreau et al. (2016) and Morris (2015) conclude that more research is needed to understand the content and process of ECAs and what it is about the ECA experience that generates these improved outcomes.

### **2.2.2 Extra-Curricular Activity and Middle Childhood**

Clubs and structured activities are theoretically a good match for middle childhood. This premise is reinforced given the aforementioned emerging identity of the child coupled with the dynamic of a burgeoning sense of competency or inferiority in middle childhood (Erikson, 1963). As an avenue to experiencing mastery and competency, ECA provides a valuable route to positive self-identity in middle childhood.

Emergent identity involves broad exploration and sampling from an array of opportunities that may trigger possible interests; early broad exploration affords deeper exploration of the opportunity of interest at a later time (Luyckx, Goosens, & Soenens, 2006; Luyckx, Klimstra, Duriez, Schwartz, & Vanhalst, 2012). This early exploration of interest may have significant influence upon future adult commitment formation (Marcia, 1993).

Metsäpelto and Pulkkinen (2014) admit that research on ECA has been heavily concentrated on adolescence and acknowledge that less is known about what kind of activities children are involved with in middle childhood and how children select their preferred activities. Metsäpelto and Pulkkinen (2014) found that in middle childhood, children are increasingly active in selecting activities based on their perceived interests and skills. The selection of ECA, therefore, reflects intrinsic motivation, where children choose activities on the basis of the enjoyment they get from performing the activity. But the authors do not comment on how activities are first discovered in order that intrinsic motivation can be developed. Metsäpelto and Pulkkinen (2014) describe the Integrated School Day program implemented by researchers from the University of Jyväskylä (Finland), which aimed to embed ECA into the school curricula. They found that extracurricular activities organised as part of the integrated day benefitted children's socioemotional development and school achievement. Many activities, such as sports and music, require advanced skills that develop relatively slowly: middle childhood may be an important time for laying the foundations for

these mastery skills. The conclusions of Metsapelto and Pulkinen (2014) were that parental values and socioeconomic status often restrict opportunities for children to participate. Understanding these mechanisms and contexts that affect children's opportunity and choice would appear to be crucial in a better understanding of ECA engagement and its barriers.

In the UK, Tanner and colleagues (2016) investigated whether out of school activities can close the attainment gap between disadvantaged and advantaged children by the end of primary school (age 10 and 11). The authors found that economically disadvantaged pupils had lower participation rates in organised activities outside school but were more likely to take part in after-school clubs due their lower cost, convenience and familiarity with staff. Academic, social and emotional benefits were identified by staff, parents and children as a result of taking part in after-school clubs. The research focussed on disadvantaged children and found that disadvantaged children who had attended an after-school club at the ages of five, seven and eleven presented higher academic attainment and better social, emotional and behavioural outcomes by the end of Key Stage 2. The authors point to a strong case for further information in this area in order to better understand and replicate the added value of structured activities outside of school hours. The authors conclude that their findings 'highlight the potential value of after school clubs for increasing opportunities for disadvantaged pupils as well as supporting positive outcomes' (Tanner et al., 2016. p.2).

In the U.S.A., Fletcher and colleagues (2003) found that greater participation in sports in middle childhood was associated with higher levels of psychosocial maturity and more positive teacher ratings of social competence. It was deemed by the report that children who spend their leisure time engaged in club activities have increased opportunities to learn relational skills and competencies through interaction with one another, in a context of team and task management that promotes the development of these competencies.

Aumetre and Poulin (2016) in Canada looked at 1038 children in middle childhood to identify the trajectories of breadth of participation in organized activities. The authors report that, as a child grows up, the number of possible organised activities increases and that in adolescence, participation in organised activities is mostly on a voluntary basis, whereas in childhood, parents play a greater role in the decision to join an organised activity. These findings may indicate why rates of ECA decline after the age of 11, with more emphasis placed upon pupils' volunteering for ECA after primary school age, rather than parental pressure. This suggests that, for those children who have never participated in primary school ECA, the tendency to abstain from ECA will strengthen. Aumetre and Poulin (2016) comment that the number of organised activities that children participate in tends to be

limited during early childhood but increases during the elementary school years (5–12 years old). Simpkins and colleagues (2006) suggest that ECA is all the more important in middle school years, because children who participate in activities during middle childhood are more likely to continue to do so during adolescence. ECA participation tends to peak at 11–13 years (Wang and Eccles, 2012; Zimmermann-Sloutskis et al., 2010) before declining throughout adolescence. Wang and Eccles (2012) found that, alongside a decline in school engagement between the ages of 11 and 15, there was an equal decline in ECA participation.

In U.S.A., Howie, Lukas, Pastor, Reuben and Mendola (2010) assessed the potential association between participation in ECA outside of school hours and behaviour in middle childhood. Children participating in both sports and clubs had greater social competence during middle childhood compared with children who did not participate in any activities outside of school. Participation in ECA was considered even as little as once in the academic year and so associations between ECA and behaviour in this study is weak.

In revealing the importance of middle childhood in the construction of self-identity through competence perceptions, Findlay and Coplan (2008) in Canada examined the role of organised sport participation as a moderator of the links between shyness and psychosocial maladjustment in middle childhood. Their study involved 355 school children with a mean age of 10.1 years. After a period of one year of organised sport participation the children completed self-report assessments of their shyness and aggression, sport participation, and psychosocial adjustment. Parents also rated children's social skills. Overall, results indicated that sport participation was positively related to indices of positive adjustment (for example, social skills and self-esteem). In particular, the report found that shy children who participated in sport over time reported a significant decrease in anxiety. The authors concluded that this was due to the role of sport as a social context to enhance shy children's peer relations. This may be particularly poignant in middle childhood as awareness of competency takes root. Findlay and Coplan (2008) further concluded that sport participation may also provide shy children with mastery experiences that contribute to fostering self-esteem. For shy children, this may be particularly important considering their high degree of anxiety in social situations. Thus, shy children benefit from repeated success in various domains in order to buffer the typically negative effect of shyness on self-esteem.

## **2.3 Triggering Extra-Curricular Activity**

Research indicates multiple benefits of ECA engagement to children in general, but in particular to shy children. However, very little research has investigated disadvantaged children and the triggering of ECA in middle childhood. One area of triggering suggested by Metsäpelto and Pulkkinen (2014) is family background. Parents have a strong influence because they motivate, encourage, and permit extracurricular activity participation. This finding supports earlier work; Anderson, Funk, Elliott & Smith, (2003) for example, found that the more parents supported and encouraged ECA, the higher the number of ECA activities their 9-to-11-year old children engaged with. Similar findings were discovered by Wheeler (2012) in investigating family sporting cultures on children's sports participation; in conducting semi-structured interviews with eight 'sporty' children who attended a primary school in North Wales and their parents, she found that sporting cultures were transmitted through the family. Wheeler describes these cultures as 'habitus', which are sets of beliefs and behaviours that the parents held, including specific goals in relation to their children's sports participation, that are extremely important for whether their children participate in ECA. Two years later, Wheeler and Green (2014) conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with parents and children from eight different families in the north-east of England and revealed an intensification of parents 'investing' in their children's sports participation. Parents reported a closer involvement in their children's leisure activities than their parents had done with them. Wheeler and Green suggest that children's sports participation illustrates an intensification in the middle-class social reproduction process.

Metsäpelto and Pulkkinen (2014) suggest that parental values and socioeconomic status often restricts the opportunity for some children to participate. Understanding the mechanisms and contexts that affect children's opportunity and choice would seem to be crucial in a better understanding of ECA engagement. Other routes are required to help participation for those children whose families are less endowed in valuing ECA investment.

## **2.4 Sustaining Extra-Curricular Activity**

Whilst there is little research into what makes children maintain ECA after an initial introduction, one area cited for ECA sustainment is fun. In a systematic review of the literature, Crane and Temple (2014) found that the two most important factors related to

dropout rates in 'organised sport' for children and youth were (1) participants' perceptions of their competence and (2) their enjoyment of sport. In their study, children and youth reported that they had dropped out when they considered the activity was no longer fun. When the meaning of 'fun' was commented on, the participants spoke of not enough playing time or opportunities, dissatisfaction with the coach and too much training time. The authors suggest that, given the prevalence and importance of 'lack of enjoyment' as a factor related to organised sport dropout, very few studies had unpacked the underlying factors of lack of enjoyment (Crane & Temple, 2014).

It is not surprising that dropout from organised sport is linked with lower perceptions of competence. Similar to the findings of Crane and Temple (2014), Weiss and Williams (2004) found that children tend to be drawn toward areas where they perceive themselves to be competent and shy away from areas where they feel unsuccessful.

In a season-long examination of fun among 7-15-year-old children playing sport in Canada, Wankel and Sefton (1989) found that fun was a positive mood state related to personal achievement. It was important that children's perceptions were that their skills were matched against realistic challenges. This adds the dimension of fun to the findings of Macpherson, Hart and Heaver (2016), who, regarding arts participation, found that children needed to be engaged in tasks that matched optimal levels of skill and challenge in order to facilitate learning.

Collins, Macnamara & McCarthy (2016), in a study of high performance student athletes in U.K., concluded that to sustain training, it is essential that young athletes have the opportunity and adequate social support to develop coping and psycho-behavioural skills, and, to ensure that adversity is interpreted as a positive growth experience. They suggest that training is a progressive set of challenges in association with skill development. This is consistent with research that shows that the challenge and excitement of competing and opportunities to test skills are important intrinsic motivators (Sirard, Pfeiffer & Pate, 2006; Yan and McCullagh, 2004).

In the U.K., McCarthy, Jones and Clark-Carter (2008) examined the developmental progression of sources of enjoyment among 152 sport participants aged 8–15 years. Self-report measures of enjoyment were used to measure sources of enjoyment, perceived sport competence, and task and goal orientation. Aligned with other research, the report found that perceived competence significantly predicted enjoyment, which aligns with the research of Weiss and Williams (2004) and Crane and Temple (2014) in sustaining participation. Older children reported significantly greater enjoyment and perceived

competency and recognition than younger children. The role of fun in sustaining ECA engagement points to the importance of understanding the developmental progression of the sources of enjoyment among children and adolescents in ECA participation, and in particular, the role of competency and skill development.

Macpherson et al. (2016) discovered that young participants in an arts project in southern England found that developing a sense of responsibility towards the group and working towards a final exhibition was motivation to sustain their participation in the activity. Learning a new skill was also identified by the authors as helping to build individual resilience.

## **2.5 Interest/Motivation/Engagement**

In general, learners are considered to elect to engage in tasks and activities in which they feel competent and confident and avoid those in which they do not (Bandura, 1997). Challenging tasks can lead some learners to feel that they are not able to learn, whilst for others, challenge is a reason to persevere. Research has shown that learners with a strong sense of their own competence approach difficult tasks and situations as challenges to be mastered, rather than as threats to be avoided (Zimmermann & Schunk, 2011). Past experience of individual interest and problem solving impacts a learner's ability to work with challenge or failure (Tulis & Ainley, 2011).

Engaged learners have typically more developed interest and are motivated to learn. They are involved behaviourally, intellectually, and emotionally in learning tasks (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004). Learners who are not engaged, by contrast, lack interest and are unmotivated. For Järvelä and Renninger (2014), there were two core questions for the learning sciences regarding the roles of interest, motivation, and engagement:

‘1. How do we enable those who are not yet engaged to develop their will and skill for learning? How can we help unmotivated learners become motivated to learn?’

2. How do we design in order to continue to support those who are already engaged, such that they continue to deepen their interest and, as a result, their motivation to learn particular disciplinary content?’

(Järvelä & Renninger, 2014, p.669)



Though interest, motivation and engagement are often interchanged (see Deci, 1992; Renninger, 2000; Renninger & Hidi, 2016) Järvelä and Renninger (2014) attempt to list the differences between these three states. They see interest as a psychological state, as well as a predisposition to reengage. They considered motivation as a broader construct than interest and one that is not specifically linked to learning of particular disciplinary content. While interest is always motivating, what is motivating is not always of interest. According to Eccles (2009), a learner chooses to take on a challenging task if he or she both expects success and values the task. The concept of engagement informs study of the ways in which learners respond to learning environments. Engagement is less a psychological construct and more a description of learners' connections to the learning environment. Engagement includes socioemotional and cognitive aspects of the learning environment. Conceptualising learner engagement in this way acknowledges the frame of the experience, the design and expectations that are facilitated and communicated (Gresali & Barab, 2011).

The components of student interest or motivation have interested scholars for a long time. What prevails a student to learn is fundamental to all pedagogic theories. With interest or motivation is also the notion of persistence or perseverance. Morrow and Ackermann (2012) call this the 'intention to persist.' Astin (1984) prefers the notion of *involvement* rather than interest or motivation. Astin posits that a highly involved student is one who devotes considerable energy to studying and who participates actively in student activities, such as ECA.

Astin (1984) also provides a list of verbs that he believes signifies *involvement*: attach oneself; to commit oneself, to devote oneself; to engage in; go in for, incline toward, join in, partake of, participate in, plunge into, show enthusiasm for, tackle, take a fancy to, take an interest in, take on, take part in, take to, take up, undertake. Most of these terms are behavioural in meaning. They do not account for meaning or value or identity. Nor do terms such as *join in*, *partake of*, *participate* necessarily imply interest. Indeed, I would suggest that the notion of *involvement* lacks a sense of motivation and portrays more a sense of duty.

In the next section I consider four interest theories to provide valuable insight into the construction of interest from individual motivation to acknowledging the role of adults play in shaping and guiding a child's interest. This section illustrates my voyage in this thesis towards adopting the word engagement as this implies not only the child's cognitive level of participation but also implies the importance of those that engage the child to participate.

### 2.5.1 Expectancy-Value Theory

Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) is based on the argument that expectancies and values determine which tasks an individual chooses to pursue. According to Gutman and Schoon (2013, p.41) ‘There is also causal evidence suggesting that expectancy-value theory may be a key motivational factor to consider especially for low-achieving students with low expectations.’

Within EVT, expectancies are defined as students’ beliefs about how well they will do in an upcoming task, and values are defined as perceived qualities of the task and how those perceived qualities influence children’s desire to do the task (Eccles, 2004, Wigfield et al., 2015). As its name suggests, EVT focuses on the importance of two components in promoting overall motivation: (1) having an expectancy of being successful in an activity and (2) possessing a value for engaging in the activity, such as importance or enjoyment (Barron and Hulleman, 2015; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). These activity expectancy values can be further refined through (a) “attainment value” (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), which is the importance of a given task (Harackiewicz, Tibbetts, Canning, & Hyde, 2014), plus (b) the “intrinsic value”, which is the enjoyment gained from doing a given task (Barron & Hulleman, 2015), (c) the “utility value”, which is the degree to which a task fits into an individual’s future plans (Hulleman, Kosovich, & Daniel, 2017), and finally (d) “cost”, or the amount of effort that will be needed to accomplish the activity (Kosovich, Hulleman, Barron, & Getty, 2015).

Jackson, Hill and Roberts (2010) argue that a child’s choice is not only generated by socio-cultural values but also is expressed by experience of previous performance. If a child has been persistently experiencing failure at school, they will be reluctant to expose themselves to yet another ‘encounter with failure’ within school. Though Seligman’s notion of learned helplessness is not linked with EVA, there are nevertheless strong associations here with Seligman’s idea of a child developing “learned helplessness” through the experience of persistent failures (Abramson and Seligman, 1978; Seligman et al., 1968). Middle childhood, forming a period in which self-esteem and identity are first developed through a child’s emerging awareness of their competencies, appears to be an important stage in a child’s development to avoid the onset of learned helplessness through the construction of routes towards success. ECA may well provide a rich vein of competency-building routes.

This would suggest that EVT might be useful in explaining why children do not participate for fear of repeated failure or volunteer through experiencing success.

In a similar vein, Bourdieu (1990) views the dispositions that make up his concept of *habitus*, as the creation of opportunities and constraints framing the individual's earlier life experiences. As a result, some activities are considered unthinkable, beyond the consciousness of some children, and only a limited range of practices are possible.

However, research emerging over recent years suggests that personality traits may be dynamic, emerging and may shift along developmental trajectories (Cairns, Yap, Pilkington & Jorm, 2014; Jackson et al., 2010; Johnson, Hicks, McGue & Iacono, 2007; Roberts, 2006). Research also indicates that personality traits can be altered by use of intervention (Clark, et al., 2003; Krasner, et al., 2009; Tang DeRubeis, Hollon, Amsterdam, Shelton & Schalet, 2009) suggesting that the onset of learned helplessness can be corrected through school experiences, which counteract previous repeated encounters with failure.

### **2.5.2 Self-Regulation Theory**

I now turn to Self-Regulation theory (SRT). This theory of interest/motivation is most associated with the notion of 'mindset' and the work of Carol Dweck. 'My work is part of a tradition in psychology that shows the power of people's beliefs.' (Dweck, 2017, p.1). Later in the same article Dweck writes:

'...my research has shown that the view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you lead your life. It can determine whether you become the person you want to be and whether you accomplish the things you value' (Dweck, 2017, p.17).

Dweck's theory of 'mindset' purports that intelligence is not a fixed entity but a malleable quality that can be improved through effort. An individual with a growth mindset would believe that their ability comes from the effort they invest into a task, and would attribute their failure at a task as a signal that they need to persevere at it, or perhaps adjust their approach or strategy (Dweck, 2006).

The uptake of growth mindset and its links with self-regulating learning in UK education has been spectacular in recent years. Toby Young, writing in *The Spectator* (2017), comments that 'Eton, Wellington and Stowe have all enthusiastically embraced it, as have thousands of state schools'. For example, Highgate Wood, a comprehensive school in north

London, mentions on their website that, 'growth mindset is the cornerstone of our learning ethos'. However, the mindset has its critics; Adi Bloom suggests that, 'mindset ends up being cited as some kind of cure-all panacea for underachievement' (The Times Educational Supplement, 2017). Dylan Wiliam, emeritus professor of educational assessment at the UCL Institute of Education reports that growth mindset is very far from a panacea. In fact, attempts to duplicate Carol Dweck's research in the classroom have shown no measurable benefit to pupils' achievement. According to Wiliam 'There have been three attempts to replicate Carol Dweck's work, and it doesn't appear to be replicable.' but 'they don't have a single example of a school successfully changing pupils' mindsets' (The Times Educational Supplement, 2017). Li and Bates (2017), for example, tested 624 10-12-year-olds in China and concluded that the belief that ability is malleable was not linked to improvement of grades across the year. The authors discovered 'no support for the idea that fixed beliefs about basic ability are harmful, or that implicit theories of intelligence play any significant role in development of cognitive ability, response to challenge, or educational attainment.' (p. 2). 'We've stopped using the phrase 'growth mindset', because the students have got sick of it,' says John Tomsett, headteacher of Huntington School in York. 'My son just gets fed up of self-righteous teachers giving assemblies about how great they were when they were up against it.' (The Times Educational Supplement, 2017).

According to Dweck (2006), mindset may be understood as a mental framework that we possess for making sense of the nature of our abilities, and an understanding towards our successes and failures. Similarly, self-efficacy can be understood as a belief an individual has in their ability to succeed or fail in specific situations (Bandura, 1982). Both mindset and self-efficacy concepts fit well within the cognitive theory of self-regulated learning.

In self-regulated learning, the role of mindset is paramount within the construct of the self-motivated student. A child possessing a growth mindset is seen to create resilience when faced with failure or difficulties in learning. A growth mindset sends a child positive messages about their effort and strategy, leading pupils to try harder, or to try a different strategy for learning. In comparison, for children with a fixed mindset failure will send a negative message about who they are. This, it is argued, will damage their self-esteem and is likely to lead them to avoid the same task in the future. This would suggest that the construction of a child's growth mindset is accomplished by promoting experiences of success and achievement, which foster this mindset. ECA may well promote routes to a growth mindset through success and achievement, but they need to exist first, and they need

to be accessible and sustained to procure self-regulation adjustments related to a growth mindset.

These concepts were first identified by Seligman and colleagues (1968) as ‘learned helplessness’, where an individual comes to receive an onslaught of obstacles as impossible to overcome. In contrast, individuals who are ‘mastery oriented’ use failure to motivate themselves; they are in growth mindset parlance resilient to challenge and failure (Blackwell, Trzesniewski & Dweck., 2007; Dweck, 1999).

What mindset fails to acknowledge is that some children face greater obstacles more frequently and with fewer resources than others and so in comparison are more prone to descend into ‘a fixed entity’ or ‘learned helplessness’ mindset through exterior conditions beyond their control. Again, questions need to be asked as to the accessibility of routes to establishing a growth mindset through educational interventions that foster competence, self-esteem and mastery.

There is a clear link between establishing a growth mindset in students and what the Educational Endowment Fund (EEF) call *Meta-cognition and self-regulation* interventions. According to the EEF (established in 2011 by the UK Government to establish a major initiative to boost the attainment of the country’s most disadvantaged children), meta-cognition and self-regulation programs (sometimes known as ‘learning to learn’) aim to help learners think about their own learning more explicitly. This is achieved by teaching pupils specific strategies to set goals and monitor and evaluate their own academic development. Self-regulation means managing one’s own motivation towards learning. The intention is often to give pupils a repertoire of strategies to choose from during learning activities.

However, a substantial amount of resilience literature has emerged in the last two decades emphasising that the level of successful coping that an individual demonstrates cannot be purely a result of personal traits but that environmental factors also facilitate or hinder adaptation to adverse circumstances (Luthar & Brown 2007; Masten 2006, 2009; Rutter, 2006).

The Social Mobility Commission’s report into *The State of the Nation* (2015) recognised *self-regulated learning* as the most important skill acquisition for disadvantaged students in narrowing the education gap with their more advantaged peers. This should be compared with Gutman and Schoon’s postulation, as mentioned above, that EVT is ‘a key motivational factor to consider especially for low-achieving students with low expectations’ (2013 p.41). Both SRT and EVT emphasise the active role of the learner (Abar & Loken, 2010; Bjork et al., 2013; Efklides, 2011; Greene & Azevedo, 2010; Winne, 2010;

Zimmerman, 2008), rather than the teacher. Azevedo and colleagues (2010) report that several models of self-regulated learning have been proposed (Boekaerts & Niemivirta, 2000; Muis, Winne, & Jamieson-Noel, 2007). These models are descriptive rather than evaluative on how students become responsible learners for regulating their own learning and performance.

Whilst these theories present different perspectives on self-regulated learning, they share the view that self-regulated learners are themselves actively constructing knowledge and use various cognitive and metacognitive strategies to control and regulate their academic learning (Zimmerman, 2000). Zimmerman (2002, p. 66), for example, provides a description of what a successful self-regulated learner looks like:

‘These learners are proactive in their efforts to learn because they are aware of their strengths and limitations and because they are guided by personally set goals and task-related strategies, such as using an arithmetic addition strategy to check the accuracy of solutions to subtraction problems. These learners monitor their behavior in terms of their goals and self-reflect on their increasing effectiveness. This enhances their self-satisfaction and motivation to continue to improve their methods of learning.’

Self-regulated learning theory is predominantly interested in outcomes and is less expansive on the process. For example, a piece of literature on self-regulated theory will stipulate what a self-regulated student looks like:

- the student is aware not only of task requirements but also of their own requirements to optimal learning experiences (McCann & Garcia, 1999; Shernoff, 2013).
- learners are aware and avoid behaviours and cognitions unfavourable to academic success; they are familiar with the strategies necessary for learning and understand how and when to exploit strategies that improve perseverance and performance (Byrnes, Miller, & Reynolds 1999; Middleton Tallman, Hatfield, & Davis, 2014; Wolters & Hussain, 2015).
- learners regard learning as a controllable process (Ley & Young, 1998).
- self-regulated students set standards or goals to strive towards in their learning, constantly monitoring their progress toward these goals, adapting and regulating their cognition, motivation, and behaviour to reach their goals (Mega, Ronconi, & De Beni, 2014; Pintrich, 2004).

What is missing from SRT is how this knowledge of self-regulation is transmitted. Self-regulated learning programs situate the young person as both the cause and potential solution to the problem. Following the growth mindset revolution of Seligman and Dweck, underachievement is no longer seen as a construct of disadvantage but recognised as a fault of the young person. According to Hart, Blincow and Thomas (2007), a self-regulation model of agency may well be unrealistic to understanding social behaviour especially for children facing adversity.

### **2.5.3 Self-Determination Theory**

Unlike EVT and SRT, which expound upon engagement being an internal composition, Self-Determination theory (SDT) is the only prominent engagement theory to encompass both the teacher and learner within the engagement process (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2013); thus, it tackles the intricacies of the relational aspects of engagement rather than the more individualistic aspects of interest and motivation as highlighted by EVT and SRT.

SDT makes explicit how and why characteristics of social context may support or thwart students' engagement. Paramount is the concept of 'need-support'. SDT assumes that three psychological human needs exist, the level of satisfaction of which will affect motivation and engagement (Deci & Ryan 1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Gagne & Deci, 2014). These three psychological needs, or dimensions of the social context, are the availability of (1) autonomy, (2) support, and (3) structure. It is important to note the inclusion of the word availability, which implies that access to resources is not uniform to all learners. Notions of chance, opportunity and choice, which were lacking in both EVT and SRT, are considered as part of the engagement process within SDT. As well as an acknowledgement to access to resources, or the route, SDT also recognises the central position of teachers in the social context of these three needs (Opdenakker & Maulana, 2010; Ryan, Huta & Deci, 2008). Let us consider these three pre-requisites for learning as postulated by SDT.

(1) The first dimension of 'need supportive' teaching is autonomy support, as opposed to autonomy suppression. Teaching is autonomy-supportive when it provides students with choice, whereas teaching is autonomy-suppressive when it is controlling (Belmont, Skinner, Wellborn & Connell, 1992) or intruding (Assor & Kaplan, 2001; Leptokaridou,

Vlachopoulos, & Papaioannou, 2016). This dimension is associated with the inherent desire of individuals to experience volition and to be causal agents. Providing choice includes enabling students to choose tasks they perceive as at least somewhat interesting or important (Assor & Kaplan, 2001; Belmont et al., 1992), and nurturing of inner resources, for example, by finding ways to incorporate students' interests and preferences (Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon & Barch, 2004).

SDT is less clear in cases where a child has not expressed interest or preferences, and whilst SDT promotes feelings of learner autonomy, learning as a self-chosen act that reflects the students' needs and values is problematic when considering a young person whose sense of identity and values are emerging. A child may not choose to participate in an ECA, not necessarily through a lack of interest but through a myriad of constraints, such as an inability to stay on at school, which is when most ECAs take place, or past negative experiences, a low level of confidence, a lack of value towards ECA.

Secondly, teaching is autonomy-supportive when it fosters relevance (Assor & Kaplan, 2001; Belmont et al., 1992; Roth & Weinstock, 2013), whereas teaching is autonomy suppressive when it compels meaningless and uninteresting activities (Assor & Kaplan, 2001; Benita, Roth & Deci, 2014). Teachers can foster relevance by identifying the value of tasks, lessons, or behaviour (Benita et al., 2014; Reeve et al., 2004).

Thirdly, teaching is autonomy-supportive when teachers show respect (Assor & Kaplan, 2001; Belmont et al., 1992; Chang, Chen, & Chi, 2016), allow criticism (Assor & Kaplan, 2001; Henderson, Turpen, Dancy, & Chapman, 2014), and use informational instead of controlling language that pressures students (Reeve et al., 2004; Roth 2014).

(2) The second pre-requisite is structure. This dimension is associated with the need for competence. People derive an inherent satisfaction from exercising and extending their capabilities (Brophy, 2013; White, 1959). This requires a child to understand their capabilities. To feel competent, it is necessary to have effective functioning but also experience of stretching of one's capabilities. It is this need for competence that provides the synergy for learning. If feelings of competence are enhanced, then students perceive more control over school outcomes. It is the teachers' provision of structure that enhances students' feelings of competence. Structure may be categorised into four components of which the teacher is pivotal.

- Teachers provide structure through clarity (giving clear, understandable, explicit, and detailed instructions and succinctly outlining forthcoming lessons).



- Teachers should offer students guidance in continuing activities, by monitoring their work or offering help or support when needed (Jang, Reeve & Deci, 2010; Skinner & Belmont, 1993).
- Teachers provide structure by means of support and encouragement (Belmont et al., 1992; Skinner et al., 2008), thereby making students feel they acquire more control over school outcomes. Teachers can encourage students by communicating positive expectations regarding their schoolwork.
- Teachers should provide constructive, informational feedback, thereby helping students to gain control over valued outcomes (Jang et al., 2010). Both negative and positive feedback may enhance students' feelings of competence through the provision of structure (Kucirkova, Messer, Sheeh, & Panadero, 2014).

(3) The third pre-requisite is relatedness. Relatedness is the desire to form and maintain strong and stable relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bowlby, 1979; Harlow, 1958; Luyten & Blatt, 2016; Ryan, 1995). Relatedness refers to the need to feel connected to others, and to belong. In their review of empirical evidence on the need to belong, Baumeister and Leary (1995) propose that the need for relatedness, or, in their terms, the need to belong, has two features. First, people need frequent personal contact that is affectively positive and pleasant and free from conflict and negative affect. Secondly, people need to perceive that there is an interpersonal bond or relationship highlighted by stability, care, and continuation. The need for relatedness can be satisfied within personal relationships and social groups. Evidence indicates that teachers' social support has a significant effect on students' emotions motivational beliefs, and achievement (Ahmed, 2010; Niemiec, Soenens, & Bansteenkiste, 2014; Wentzel, 1999). When teachers show involvement in their students' lives, these students are more likely to experience feelings of belongingness. When students perceive that they are not valued by their teachers their sense of relatedness will suffer (Osterman, 2000). Based on prior theorizing by Belmont et al., (1992), Skinner and Belmont (1993), Vollet, Kindermann and Skinner (2017), teachers' involvement may be categorised into four components.

- teachers can express their involvement by showing affection.
- teachers can express their attunement, by demonstrating that they understand the student.
- teachers can dedicate resources (for example, time) to the student.

- teachers can make sure that they are dependable, and available to offer support (Furlong, You, Renshaw, Smith, & O'Malley, 2014).

Whereas EVT and SRT are mostly concerned with the values, expectations and mindset of the student, SDT focusses more on the intricacies of the relational aspects of engagement between the teacher and the learner rather than the more individualistic aspects of interest and motivation of the learner. SDT promotes feelings of learner autonomy through creating sympathetic pedagogic environments rather than describing these as necessary traits. SDT sharpens our understanding of what needs to be in place to guide pupils along the route towards self-regulated learning and shaping student values and expectations in route building, the process of triggering and sustaining student interest.

#### **2.5.4 Co-Regulation Theory**

Co-Regulation theory (CRT) refers to the relationships among cultural, social, and personal sources of influence that together may challenge, shape, and guide (co-regulate) identity (McCaslin, 2004, 2009). Whilst SDT is sensitive to both the role of the teacher and learner in the process of engagement, CRT recognises wider social and ecological factors that may influence engagement.

CRT is an endeavour to capture the dynamics of what McCaslin terms 'emergent interaction' (2009); emergent interaction being the process through which an individual mediates and internalises social and cultural influences (Wertsch & Stone, 1985). Emergent interaction, therefore, examines the dynamics of how individuals internalise the external and suggests an evolving integration of self through the engagement of activities that inform personal meanings, that is, an emergent identity. Opportunities that afford engagement of activities, then, are part of the dynamics of emergent interaction and identity. ECA engagement is especially relevant to CRT with its emphasis on activity.

Co-regulation seeks to demonstrate the link between actions and outcomes and expands upon earlier work on control and self-efficacy and personal agency (Bandura, 1997; Rotter, 1966). CRT builds directly on Vygotsky's (1962, 1978) *zone of proximal development* (ZPD), the pedagogic model of presenting challenging opportunities and teaching, or 'scaffolding' strategies, to achieve goals. Research in this area suggests that levels of problem difficulty are crucial to engagement levels and outcomes in the emergence of student adaptive learning. This resonates with Wankel and Sefton (1989) who found that it was important that

children's perceptions were that their skills were matched against realistic challenges in order to promote a positive mood state that was related to personal achievement. Similarly, regarding arts participation, Macpherson and colleagues (2016) found that children needed to be engaged in tasks that match optimal levels of skill and challenge in order to build interest.

However, learners differ in their interpretation of similar opportunities and respond differentially to them (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005). Learners also differ in resoluteness to failure because of their historical meaning systems that they bring to the activity and that they extract from their achievement outcomes.

Engagement in supportive relationships is a central Vygotskian construct. Supportive relationships have been found to be especially important for pupils who attend schools that serve students of poverty (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Hamre, et al., 2013), at-risk youth (Jones & Jones, 2015; Watson & Battistich, 2006), and students who experience barriers to participation (Hadwin, Järvelä & Miller, 2011; McCaslin, 2009) What children do and in connection with whom inform who children might become (Lawlor, 2003). Lawlor argues that for childhood development we need to study 'socially occupied beings engaged in co-created occupations' to enhance our understanding of children's experiences and engagement theory (p.424).

Thus, the essence of the ZPD, CRT, and subsequent emergent identity is engagement. Co-regulation of the ZPD involves activity and engagement wherein each participant has two roles, both the expert and the novice (Yowell & Smylie, 1999). In classrooms, pupils are experts in the contingencies of their social environments, whereas teachers are typically novices in this arena. Teachers, however, are experts in strategic knowledge that can promote positive outcomes for their pupils, whereas students are novices in this domain (McCaslin & Hickey, 2001). In co-regulated learning, each participant is enriched; engagement is the essential construct as social beings in the seeking of "belonginess" (McCaslin, 2009). As social beings, humans seek a sense of belongingness with and value to others that McCaslin (2009) suggests is realised through participation. Belonginess through participation as a basic human need embeds us in our social relationships and culture through validation.

Co-regulation learning is developed by supportive relationships that mentor and demonstrate (scaffold) the meaning of responsibility and commitment within an 'arena of comfort' (Barber & Olsen, 2004; Kingery & Erdley, 2007; Simmons & Blyth, 1987). External supports and hindrances, which shape and guide the dynamics of opportunity and choice for a young person, are highlighted by CRT. Whilst motivated behaviour is viewed in

cognitive theories such as EVT and SRT as a result of choices that individuals make (Bandura, 1997; Eccles, 2005; Elliot & Dweck, 2005), under CRT, choice is only one motivational dynamic. The notion of choice can be misleading. So much of what we do is governed externally and why we participate in these activities is not particularly mindful, knowledgeable, or strategic (McCaslin, 2009). For example, there is a limited choice of ECA that a school can offer, with some schools, especially in the private sector offering more choice and better equipment. Qualities or spectrums of mindfulness, knowledge, appetite, and self-regulation involve learning through experience. However, in my view, learning requires opportunity and opportunities to learn to make choices are not equitably distributed. This seriously restricts the usefulness of choice in understanding motivation. We need a socio-ecological understanding of interest and motivation, like that offered by CRT, that helps us better understand the role of opportunity and support in childhood that restricts and shapes interest and motivation.

## 2.6 Engagement

In this section I examine how the notion of *engagement* might help us better understand the process of interest/motivation formation in childhood and, in particular, the triggering and sustaining of ECA in middle childhood. A child may not yet know where their interest lies. A child may be interested in an activity but does not have the opportunity or courage to participate. A child may equally participate in an activity but have no interest. For children who have previously never participated in an ECA, engagement may imply a process of introducing an activity to a child and the child accepting to participate. Triggering participation may not be sufficient to create enough interest for the child to persevere. The literature cited earlier on sustaining ECA pointed to structuring a process to enable participants to perceive levels of competence and enjoyment. This suggests that the scaffolding and management of tasks versus skill levels is important in continued participation.

The nomenclature is not clear; the terms *motivation*, *interest* and *engagement* are often used interchangeably or in conjunction (Deci, 1992; Ding et al., 2013; Renninger, 2000; Renninger & Hidi, 2016). Other authors have tried to differentiate these terms providing overviews on student motivation (Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009) and student engagement (Christenson, Reschly & Wylie, 2012). Stroet, Opdenakker and Minnaert (2013) combine both interest and motivation and equate interest as a motivational variable. For Stroet and

colleagues, engagement is seen as an externalisation of motivation. Not the external influences upon the individual by another or others, but the external behavioural manifestation of motivation as expressed in persistence or attention, or emotion, for example, enthusiasm or enjoyment (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2016). Similarly, Renninger and Hidi (2011) state that interest is a cognitive and affective motivational variable that guides attention and develops through experience.

The term *interest* can describe two distinct (though often co-occurring) experiences: an individual's momentary experience of being captivated by an object as well as more lasting feelings that the object is enjoyable and worth further exploration. Interest is, therefore, both a psychological state characterised by increased attention, effort, and affect, experienced in a particular moment (situational interest), as well as an enduring predisposition to reengage with an object or topic over time (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). But situational interest is almost never within the control of the child nor predispositions to re-engage except where chance, choice and opportunity are present. Situational interest suggests opportunity, which may not be available to all or be within a particular child's dispositions to choose to engage if the opportunity exists.

Benson, Scales, Hamilton and Sesma (2006) speak of positive nutrients, or opportunities, supports and experiences in a young person's ecology; the more nutrients the higher level of flourishing. Benson (2008) and Benson and Scales (2009) have elaborated this concept further in their description of 'thriving' in adolescence. Central to the notion of thriving is an adolescent's 'sparks.' Sparks are described as a passion for a self-identified interest, skill, or capacity that metaphorically lights a fire in an adolescent's life, providing energy, joy, purpose, and direction. Thriving is then seen as the combination of sparks over time, and the action that the youth and others take to support, develop, and nurture those sparks. Furthering this work on sparks, Scales, Benson and Roehlkepartain (2011) asked adolescents about their talents, interest, and hobbies. To determine whether they had a talent, interest, or hobby that met their criteria for being named a 'spark', researchers asked the adolescents whether they were passionate about something, something that gave them purpose, direction, or focus. Time spent in after-school programs, and participation in high-quality after-school programs were found to strongly determine spark frequency. Scales and colleagues (2011) found that the accumulation of 'sparks', or deep passions, correlated strongly with better academic, psychological, social, and behavioural well-being for adolescents, which correlate with previous research. They concluded that the presence of sparks could explain the concurrent outcomes more strongly than demographics such as

gender, race/ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. But whilst the presence of a deep enduring interest/passion was identified with positive outcomes, the research provides no indication as to how ‘sparks’ are triggered or sustained.

What ignites a spark in activity? The initial engagement process, whether in childhood, adolescence or adulthood, is equally missing from the comprehensive work of Stebbins. His Serious Leisure Perspective represents the accumulation of over 20 years investigating the significance of leisure pursuits by adults who identify themselves by their leisure activities (Stebbins, 2007). Stebbins has identified six qualities of serious leisure:

- perseverance
- significant personal effort
- a career course in the pursuit (progress & contingencies)
- identity with the pursuit
- a unique ethos
- the durable outcomes of personal enrichment

(Stebbins 2006, 2017)

Beyond individual benefits of serious leisure, Stebbins also identifies social rewards, such as a sense of being needed by others, an awareness of accomplishing a serious leisure project as a group, and an appreciation of the interaction with other serious participants.

These ‘serious leisure’ qualities, both individual and social, have been allied to salutogenesis, which is an approach focusing on factors that support human health and well-being, rather than on factors that cause disease (pathogenesis) (Antonovsky, 1996; Benko, 2017; Caldwell, 2005). A serious leisure career or commitment has also been associated with the concept of *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Stebbins, 2010; Wright, Sadlo & Stew, 2007). Flow is the experiential consequence of a perceived balance between personal skill and situational challenge. When individuals experience this balance during an activity, they may have an optimal experience. Optimal experience may also be produced in serious leisure activities because they provide substantial challenges, and the connection between flow and serious leisure has been supported in work undertaken with adults (Mannell, 1993; Stebbins, 2007). Flow is one form of optimal experience, and it clarifies how and why the activity becomes meaningful. As Csikszentmihalyi (1990) noted, flow may be an important aspect of well-being because experiencing flow can protect against negative well-being.

Work on flow, serious leisure and salutogenesis have largely been focussed on activity that was sustained sufficient time such that the activity became meaningful and therefore, part of the individual's identity. Serious leisure perspectives, flow theory and salutogenesis tend to focus on states of mind rather than on initial engagement or how serious leisure careers and potential gateways to optimal experience or flow are activated.

My literature review revealed that most theories of learning motivation, other than SDT and CRT, were found to have a cognitive framework and focused on individuals' thoughts, evaluations and beliefs. However, I would suggest that *engagement* can signify a relational process between the teacher and the learner. This relational process of engaging might be particularly significant in middle childhood when previous experiences are limited and values and expectations are, as yet, only partially formed. It is perhaps the role of the engager, the gate keeper to ECA, that may shape future levels of interest and motivation within the child. Within a school context engagement, ECA turns the spotlight upon the relational role of practitioners in the school and the child, and not solely the child. This points to an ecological focus on the construct of ECA engagement in middle childhood. This dynamic of the interplay between a child and their environment, the ability of an environment to influence a child's response, is also echoed in the literature on childhood resiliency.

## **2.7 Resilience**

In this section, I examine resilience literature in general before concentrating upon the context of resilience building in schools, school environments, experiences and practices that may engage a child in ECA as a possible route towards resilient outcomes for that child. Beyond the domain of the family, school remains the next developmental asset most consistently available. Resilience in this thesis is the ability to resist, combat and perhaps even defeat the cumulative adverse effects of poverty and disadvantage for a child.

The debate as to how interest is constructed in childhood also applies to the notion of resilience. Whilst there is an agreement that the notion of resilience implies the relative ability of individuals to respond to adversity, differences arise as to how these responsive strategies are best achieved. The four interest theories examined earlier in this chapter provide a spectrum from individual traits and outcomes (EVT and SRT), to a process driven perspective (SDT and CRT), which recognises the role of practitioners and their practice in

forming childhood *engagement*. I have suggested that the term *engagement*, rather than motivation or interest, encompasses both triggering and sustaining, and therefore focusses both on the route and the destination or outcome. We may also apply the analogy of the journey and the destination to the term resilience to appreciate how resilient outcomes are achieved through resilient processes. Accordingly, the engagement of a child in ECA, rather than the interest or motivation of the child, may be considered a route to resilience.

Resilience literature has increasingly emerged in the last two decades, which has emphasised that the level of successful coping that an individual demonstrates cannot be purely a result of personal traits but that environmental factors also facilitate or hinder adaptation to adverse circumstances (Luthar & Brown 2007; Masten, 2006, 2009; Rutter 2006; Ungar, Ghazinour & Richter, 2013). The ground-breaking work of Rutter (2006) demonstrated that resilience could not be predicted by a single individual variable and that patterns of coping under stress will vary over life span. However, for Rutter (2006), the individual remained the locus of control for ‘it requires a move from a focus on external risks to a focus on how these external risks are dealt with by the individual’(p.8), as resilience focuses attention on the coping mechanisms, the mental capabilities, and personal agency of individuals. However, emerging resilience research suggests important additions to our understanding of individuals coping with external risk (Hart et al, 2016; Prillentensky, Prillentensky & Voorhees, 2008). The higher the degree and frequency that a child is exposed to adversity, for example, exposure to violence, poverty or disability, the more likely that the child’s resilience will depend on the quality of their environment, rather than the child’s innate qualities and capabilities. The quality of a child’s environment has important implications for engagement and interest theory and the availability of pathways of ECA engagement to be formed and then maintained. For this opens questions as to whether it is a child’s mindset, their values and expectancies (EVT) and self-regulation (SRT) that dictate the activities undertaken and response towards these activities or whether it is access to experiences within the child’s ecology that shape these responses. Resilience cannot be considered as an outcome in isolation from an examination of the route or processes that shaped this outcome. This makes resilience an emergent outcome of dynamic and relational processes.



## 2.8 A Child's Ecology

It was forty years ago that Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) began to conceive of the child's world as a layered assembly that radiated both out from and into the centre of the child. Highly influenced by his predecessor and mentor, Kurt Lewin, whose Change theory stated that equilibrium could be more easily moved if restraining forces were removed because restraining forces were usually the driving forces in the system (Lewin, 1951).

Bronfenbrenner considered child development as one of systems and their interconnections, and that these interactions that play a decisive role for individual development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). For Bronfenbrenner, it was the exterior environmental factors that shape the individual's interior developmental qualities, and he defined human development 'as the person's evolving conception of the ecological environment, and his [sic] relation to it, as well as the person's growing capacity to discover, sustain, or alter its properties' (p. 9).

As Bronfenbrenner was continually revising his developmental theory, which Rosa and Trudge (2013) identify as existing principally in three phases, they recommend that researchers, when referring to Bronfenbrenner, to avoid theoretical incoherence, 'should be cautious about stating that their research is based on Bronfenbrenner's theory without specifying which version they are using' (p.243). When referring to Bronfenbrenner in this thesis, I am in particular indicating phase 3, the final stage (post 1993) as identified by Rosa and Trudge (2013). The objective of this phase of the development of Bronfenbrenner's theory was to highlight how individual characteristics, in conjunction with aspects of their context, both spatial and temporal, influence what Bronfenbrenner now called 'proximal processes' — the 'engines of development' (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p. 118). Bronfenbrenner saw proximal processes as almost always acting in a positive way on developmental outcomes, either by promoting outcomes of competence or by weakening dysfunctional outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006). Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) defined competence as the 'demonstrated acquisition and further development of knowledge, skill, or ability to conduct and direct one's own behavior across situations and developmental domains' (p. 118). They defined dysfunction as 'the recurrent manifestation of difficulties in maintaining control and integration of behaviour across situations and different domains of development' (p. 118). During phase 3, Bronfenbrenner extended his development of a theory that could lead, through policy, to improving the living environments for children, adolescents, and their

families through improving proximal processes within individual's ecologies to optimize developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006). Bronfenbrenner envisaged proximal processes having greater chance of promoting outcomes of developmental competence in more stable environments. In unstable settings, proximal processes would function by avoiding or slowing outcomes of developmental dysfunction (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006). According to Berk (2006) these adaptations of Bronfenbrenner's ideas resulted in a 'bio-psycho-social-ecological systems theory' that offered the most complete account of circumstantial influences on children's development.

Later resilience research (Hart et al., 2016; Masten, 2006, Masten & Obradovic, 2008; Ungar, 2007, 2013) acknowledges the influence of Bronfenbrenner and the causal role of social and ecological factors in determining individual levels of resilience. For example, a study of adolescents in 11 countries by Ungar et al. (2007) identified eight aspects of the young person's environment that work in tension with one another to create processes that are associated with 'doing well' under stress: (1) relationships (2) a powerful identity (3) power and control (4) social justice (5) access to material resources (6) a sense of cohesion (7) belonging and spirituality and (8) cultural adherence. According to the authors, these are universal pre-requisites to 'doing well' and navigation to these eight aspects of well-being are shaped by negotiations between individuals or groups (families and communities) and those who act as gatekeepers to the resources that nurture well-being, such as schools and local governments. In this regard, these navigations became constrained or facilitated, either promoting or detracting from a child's self-efficacy.

In this section I have examined resilience residing within a child's ecology. These may be proximal processes, the 'engines of development' (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p. 118), which are engaging mechanisms that provide a child by promoting outcomes of competence or by weakening dysfunctional outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006). I now turn, within a child's ecology, to school, to examine engaging mechanisms, the proximal processes, as routes to childhood resilience, especially for vulnerable children experiencing adversity beyond school.

## **2.9 Resilience: The School Context**

Schools have the potential to be 'game changers' in the lives of vulnerable children (Gilligan, 2009; Zeller, 2014). Research evidence seems to underline the importance for those

children who experience adversity at home to have havens of respite or asylum in other spheres of their lives (Gilligan, 2000). Reducing, even by one, the number of problem areas in a child's life may have a disproportionate and decisive impact. Such unexpected gains may occur because adversity seems most debilitating when it comes in multiple forms. As adversities mount up — abuse plus domestic violence plus educational failure plus family poverty — the cumulative negative impact seems to soar (Hart et al., 2016; Rutter, 1990). The child's response, their resilient stance against the degree and frequency of exposure to adversity will depend on the quality of their environment to build buffers to these adversities, rather than the child's internal predisposed qualities and capabilities. Reducing the accumulation of problem areas seems to reduce the risk of later problems (Gilligan, 2000). This indicates that a small change within a child's profile or functioning in school may have an important wider ripple effect generating momentum, possibly for a virtuous spiral of change and development. It may be helpful to think of developmental pathways along which children progress as they grow up (Bowlby, 1988). Rather like a yacht on a journey, the young person's development may be blown off course by unfavourable incidents or winds, and back on course if conditions turn more advantageous. Change is not something that necessarily occurs through deliberate, or complex, or mysterious, or serendipitous, or long-term, processes. The school route analogy allows us to glimpse the idea that a course can be altered by something relatively minor or transient. One single favourable incident may positively alter the course of a yacht's journey. One favourable experience may be a turning point in a child's or young person's trajectory of development. This concept of 'turning points' has much currency in the literature on human and child development (Clausen, 1995; Elder, 2018). It would seem to have a particularly hopeful value for those working with children in adversity (Hutchinson, 2018).

The work of Theron and colleagues (Theron & Donald, 2013; Theron, Liebenberg, & Malindi, 2014) demonstrated that school ecologies contain rich and numerous opportunities for resilience-building and resilience-enhancing interactions between school practitioners and children who are vulnerable to poor outcomes. Beyond the domain of the family, school remains the next developmental asset most consistently available. School-based professionals have a critical role in enhancing the resilience of vulnerable youth (Noltemeyer & Bush, 2013). It is, therefore, important to expand our understanding of the practices that school-based practitioners can use to build resilience in vulnerable children whilst also acknowledging the resilience of the practitioners themselves.

Schools function as a vitally important context for child development. A school that functions well in a context of adversity also can be said to manifest resilience. There is interest in the resilience inside classrooms (Doll, Zucker, & Brehm, 2016; Song, Doll & Marth, 2013) and schools (Wang & Gordon, 1994, Brooks, 2006; Day & Gu, 2013; University of Brighton, 2019). The resilience of adults who work in schools is important because these individuals often play a central role in school resilience while also serving as protective adults or brokers of resources in the lives of high-risk children (Masten & Obradovic, 2008).

Agastini and Longobardi's (2014) findings show that some school-level factors are positively associated with the students' probability of becoming resilient. Agastini and Longobardi propose the idea of a 'resilient school' in which one characteristic of a resilient school is where teachers collaborate on important and challenging aspects, and help disadvantaged students. This fosters a relationship between the teacher and the student. Research has demonstrated that positive teacher-student relationships are positively related to the student's results, especially for low-income children. This sheds light on controllable factors that can be correlated positively with students' resilience and achievement. More specifically, Agastini and Longobardi (2014) suggest that schools with a high intake of disadvantaged students should invest their resources in ECA. The authors also conclude that it is also likely that ECA promotes student's attitudes towards more engagement with the school's environment. Similarly, The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2012) reported a link between schools with higher levels of pupil participation in ECA and pupil positive attitudes towards school subjects, suggesting that there is a link between ECA and engagement with school in general.

If ECA is linked with more positive attitudes towards school by those children and young people who participate, then we need to turn our attention towards the aspects of ECA experiences in school that generate these positive attitudes and how they may be applied to children in middle childhood to create a firm base of school belonging that may be sustained into adolescence.

## **2.10 Resilience: School Experiences**

School experiences play a vital role in the emergent identity trajectory of a child. Given the importance of middle childhood as the beginnings of awareness of competency versus inferiority, positive school experiences are vital in establishing positive self-esteem.

Self-esteem derives from a person's sense of their own worthiness and competence. According to Rutter (1990), the two types of experience which seem most important in influencing self-esteem are (a) secure and harmonious love relationships and (b) success in accomplishing tasks that are identified by individuals as central to their interests. Schools and ECA may be two contexts rich with possible routes towards success (Gilligan, 2000).

Voelkl (1997) referred to the affective bond between students and their schools as 'identification with school.' A growing body of research has begun to link school/classroom environments and school engagement with academic achievement (Dotterer & Lowe, 2011; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White & Salovey, 2012). Concerning middle childhood Patrick, Ryan and Kaplan (2007) examined relationships among classroom social environment, engagement, and achievement among early adolescents in U.S 5th grade (around 9-years-old). The researchers found that the classroom social environment including teacher support, student support, and promotion of interaction was positively related to cognitive (self-regulated learning) and behavioural (classroom participation) engagement. In turn, behavioural engagement was positively related to math grades. Further evidence of the connections between social environment, school engagement, and academic achievement comes from a study of middle school students (Wang & Holcombe, 2010). In their longitudinal study, Wang and Holcombe (2010) found that school social environment (autonomy, teacher support, performance goals, mastery goals, and discussion) in U.S.7th grade (11 years old) predicted affective (school identification), behavioural (school participation), and cognitive (self-regulation strategies) engagement in 8th grade (Key Stage 3, 12 years olds in UK).

Research suggests that social support from teachers and peers, and parents can promote positive academic outcomes and prevent negative psychological outcomes during adolescence (Garnefski & Diekstra, 1996; Malecki & Demaray, 2007; Wang, Selman, Dishion, & Stormshak, 2011). Waters, Cross and Shaw (2010) found ECA to be a crucial link between a school's ecology and adolescent perceptions of 'school connectedness'. Data was extracted from 3,769 Australian students (12–13 years old) from 39 randomly selected schools who were followed for one year. Building upon the evidence of schools creating a sense of belonging for students, Waters and colleagues found that a sense of school belonging included connectedness to teachers and peers, and participation in ECA. The authors conclude that 'developmental health theories' provide support for the interaction between an individual and their context and how this shapes outcomes of resilience, development, and behaviour (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) whilst also inferring Self-Determination theory (SDT)

(Deci and Ryan, 2000) to a school ecology. Regarding SDT, the authors equate student school connectedness as dependent on the extent to which each student interacts within a school ecology to satisfy their need to feel autonomous, competent, and related.

## **2.11 Resilience and Practitioner Practice**

What practitioners do and their relationships with children, the experiences they structure for children, are important in the construct of a child's route to resilience. What Masten (2001) terms 'ordinary magic' and Aranda and Hart (2015) call 'resilient moves' are simple caring practices that schools and practitioners can execute to bolster a connectedness and well-being for the child to their school. Practitioners function directly as promotive and protective factors in the lives of high-risk children while also nurturing the learning skills, and resilience of each child. Practitioners, therefore, have the potential to be pivotal in driving proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006) within a child's ecology, that is, powerful protective school relationships (Galassi, Griffin & Akos, 2008; Masten, 2006). If we can understand why some children have unexpectedly good outcomes despite exposure to adversity, then we may have important clues about how to transfer those gains to wider numbers of children who might otherwise succumb to the frequently damaging effects of adversity. This provides us with insight into how to beat the odds of adversity and potentially change these odds.

Secure attachments supply the child with a reliable 'secure base', which encourages and renders safe exploration of the wider world (Bowlby, 1988). While it is most desirable for the developing young person to have secure relationships with one or more primary attachment figures, it is important to realise that attachment relationships of lesser significance may still play an important protective role for a child. It is not necessary for the child to have a primary attachment to a person in order for positive value to accrue from the relationship. Gilligan (2000) advocates the role of 'spare time activities' in building resilience of young people. He cites the example of a girl who was weak academically but who 'had her attachment to school sustained by her success and involvement in the school choir' (p. 43). Likewise, a boy with 'extreme behavioural difficulties' found solace when an art teacher in the referral unit which the boy attended began to foster the boy's talent for art (p. 43). These accounts teach us that competence, confidence and caring can flourish, even under adverse

circumstances, if children encounter persons who provide them with the secure basis for the development of trust, autonomy and initiative (Rutter, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1992).

The findings of a practitioner-oriented research review (Hart & Heaver, 2013) identified themes of effective resilient practitioner practices: (1) promoting problem-solving skills, (2) building relationships, and (3) working at multiple levels beyond the individual, (for example, school, family, and community). The authors found that the formation of a bond with one caring adult was considered particularly significant in building a sense of belonging and constructing expectations for pupils.

Research has indicated that children who have negative relationships with their teachers are more likely to have problems related to school engagement and academic achievement (Baker, 2006; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Stipek & Miles, 2008). Student–teacher relationship quality may be particularly important for at-risk students (Liew, Chen, & Hughes, 2010; Rudasill & Rimm-Kaufman, 2009). Liew et al. (2010) recognise that, although the characteristics that students bring into the classroom may influence their learning, the learning environment may also directly influence students’ achievement. Positive student–teacher relationships may serve as a protective mechanism to promote resiliency within the academic environment for at-risk students. Thus, the social and emotional environment of the classroom is important for students’ engagement and achievement in school. Students will be more engaged when classroom contexts meet their needs for relatedness, which is likely to occur in classrooms where teachers and peers create a caring and supportive environment (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004).

Through their actions in the school or classroom, practitioners can convey a sense of caring, respect, and appreciation for their students that may lead to students’ greater engagement in school. Practitioner social support predicts a range of indicators of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Wang & Eccles, 2012; Wang & Holcombe, 2010).

Dotterer and Lowe (2011) and Hughes (2012) found that classroom context and school engagement are significant predictors of academic achievement. These factors were found to be especially important for academically at-risk students, supporting the findings of Liew et al. (2010) and Pianta et al. (1995). In the U.S.A., Dotterer and Lowe (2011) examined links between classroom context, school engagement, and academic achievement among early adolescents with ‘academic problems’ (mean age = 11) by exploring the mechanisms that underlie the antecedents and consequences of school engagement. Their study drew upon a developmental-ecological model concerned with the dynamic interplay of person characteristics and ecological conditions (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The

microsystem describes aspects of the environment that directly influence the individual, such as the student-teacher relationship and the classroom. The ecological systems perspective emphasizes the importance of social relationships for youth across key microsystems, such as home and school. Development occurs as result of active participation in progressively complex, reciprocal interactions with persons, objects, and symbols in the individual's immediate environment. Proximal processes vary systematically as a function of the characteristics of the developing person and of the environment in which the processes are taking place. Results indicated that, for students with previous achievement difficulties, psychological and behavioural engagement did not mediate the link between classroom context and academic achievement. These results suggest that improving classroom quality may not be sufficient to improve student engagement and achievement for students with previous achievement difficulties. The authors conclude that additional strategies may be needed for these students. Classroom context was not related to psychological engagement of students with previous achievement difficulties. It may be that for students with previous achievement difficulties, high quality classroom contexts are not sufficient to increase student's psychological engagement (Dotterer and Lowe, 2011).

The work of Dotterer and Lowe (2011) suggests that different mechanisms may be important for at risk students. Although their findings indicate that enhancing classroom context via instructional quality, positive social/emotional classroom climate, and positive relationships with teachers can foster student engagement and academic achievement, it cannot be assumed that this will work for all groups of students. For students with previous achievement difficulties, other factors may be more important in enhancing engagement, such as method of instruction.

When adversities faced by children and young people result from embedded inequality and social disadvantage, resilience-based knowledge has the potential to influence the wider adversity context by focusing beyond the simple unit of the child's mindset and self-regulation. Resilience based knowledge allows us to understand why these individual dispositions are influenced. This follows Bronfenbrenner's wish to extend his development of a theory that could influence policy to enhance the living environments for children, adolescents, and their families through improving proximal processes within individual's ecologies to optimise developmental outcomes.

An understanding of individual resilience as a construct within a multilevel web of relations (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ungar, 2008) allows to 'shift inequality theorising beyond the individual towards deeper, detailed social understandings of transformation and change'



(Aranda & Hart, 2015). This too provides implications for reframing ontology, agency and change away from psychological to socio-ecological solutions. In partnership with an inequalities approach to understanding resilience, Aranda and Hart identify practice theory as a useful tool in building a contextual/ecological approach to resilience.

This section has considered resilience to be a social practice or action, rather than an individual trait. Resilience is something that may be seen to emerge initially from the exterior, for example, the school and/or the practitioner converging with the individual and the child/student and thereby changing or possibly transforming both.

There are important implications under this approach in our understandings of the processes of triggering and sustaining ECA engagement in childhood. Better understandings of the external contexts and mechanisms of engagement have crucial implications for pedagogical interventions and programs. This requires us to think retrospectively and prospectively about what works, for whom and when. This places the school as a key mechanism to generate resilience processes and practices, which may influence a child's resilient dispositions.

## **2.12 Chapter Conclusion**

In this Literature Review chapter, I have examined middle childhood and its association with a development of a child's perception of their competencies. I have highlighted the rich accounts of the multiple benefits afforded to children and young people through participation in ECA. These benefits have been especially linked to vulnerable pupils, academically at-risk pupils and socially disadvantaged pupils. I have recognised that school may be the only route for some pupils to access ECA. Given the multiple benefits of ECA and their link to mastery experiences that foster self-perceptions of competency, ECA offers valuable routes to competency that may be taken by pupils in a school context. This makes ECA a particularly potent route for those children who experience repeated failure. ECA and their routes to competency can be considered an antidote to the onset of learned helplessness. Given that middle childhood is a developmental stage associated with the birth of competency perceptions, this makes middle childhood and ECA a good match. This match is even more relevant given that research reveals that ECA participation decreases after the

age of eleven. A child who has never participated in an ECA before transferring to secondary school will probably never participate at all throughout their entire education.

This chapter has described four interest theories. EVT and SRT have a strong determination to emphasise the characteristics of the learner, whereas SDT and CRT focus more upon the learning environment and teacher practice. As a result of the descriptions of these four theories of interest, this chapter has considered the term engagement best encapsulates both the triggering and sustaining of a child's ECA participation by recognising that interest or motivation may not be expressed or known by a child but requires stimulating or constructing. This draws our attention to the quality of a child's environment to afford and introduce a child to positive competence building experiences. Beyond home life, school is the most consistent context within a child's ecology.

As with engagement, this chapter recognises that a child's resilience, their ability to confront and surmount adversity, is driven by the quality of their environment. This chapter has analysed resilience to be the quality of a child's school environment, experiences and practitioner practices that may influence the child's levels to perform better than expected given the odds. This places resilience as both the child's outcome and the proximal processes of the school, for which ECA engagement in middle childhood would appear to be an effective route.

In recognising the potential for ECA to be particularly effective in benefitting the outcomes of vulnerable pupils, academically at risk pupils and socially disadvantaged pupils, in the next chapter I examine educational policy and recommendations aimed at improving the academic outcomes and life chances of FSM pupils in the UK since 2010. In the light of my literature review, which highlights the importance of school experiences and relationships, governmental policy and recommendations have increasingly focussed on building students' characters, but with a continued recognition that little is known about whether or how character can be taught. However, the importance of ECA is beginning to be recognised. In a change from being outcome focussed, the Ofsted Education inspection framework 2019 is 'proposing an evolutionary shift that rebalances inspection to look rather more closely at the substance of education' (Ofsted, 2019). This framework was rolled out in schools in September 2019 and acknowledges the role of ECA in contributing to student outcomes.

## **Chapter 3. Educational Policy and Recommendations**

In this chapter I document the educational policy and recommendations since 2010 aimed at improving the academic outcomes of disadvantaged students. This chapter underlines the structural factors of inequality that determine the life chances of pupils. It highlights governmental and supporting bodies, such as the Educational Endowment Foundation (EEF), the Social Mobility Commission (SMC), the Sutton Trust (ST) and The Education Policy Institute (EPI) responses to these inequalities. This chapter examines the EEF tool kit, which is aimed at identifying and proposing the most effective school interventions to improve the educational outcomes of poorer pupils. The tool kit has persistently placed little value upon ECA in raising the attainment of poorer pupils, but this chapter describes a renewed acknowledgement of ECA as an effective route to resilience. In the light of my literature review in Chapter 2 and this chapter's analysis of current UK education and policy, this chapter will conclude by identifying a gap in research and the subsequent research aims of this thesis.

### **3.1 Setting the Inequalities Scene**

Perhaps it is not surprising that two schools on either side of an English coastal town's shopping centre have such vast differences in resources and the life chances of their pupils. Britain is an unequal society and social mobility – the chances that the offspring of the children of the poorer school ever making it to the rich school on the other side of the shopping centre – are getting worse. For example, David Cameron, speaking as the British Prime Minister in an address to the Conservative annual conference in October, 2014, said:

‘Listen to this: Britain has the lowest social mobility in the developed world. Here, the salary you earn is more linked to what your father got paid than in any other major country. I'm sorry, for us Conservatives, the party of aspiration, we cannot accept that’ (The Independent, 2016).

The Social Mobility Commission (SMC) is an advisory non-departmental public body established in 2010 under the Life Chances Act and later modified by the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. The SMC assesses progress in improving social mobility levels in the

UK and promotes social mobility in England. According to the SMC (2015), four private schools and one highly selective state sixth-form college send more pupils to Oxford or Cambridge than do 2,000 other secondary schools. The most prestigious 100 schools secure 30% of all Oxbridge places and 84 of these schools are private.

Three years later, in 2018, the Sutton Trust (a foundation that improves social mobility in the UK through evidence-based programmes, research and policy advocacy) produced a report to show that the monopoly of Oxbridge places to private schools had increased, with pupils from private schools seven times more likely to attend Oxbridge than state school students. Eight elite schools sent as many pupils to Oxbridge between 2015 and 2018 as three-quarters of all the state schools in the country (The Sutton Trust, 2018). One of the recommendations from The Sutton Trust was that universities should make greater use of contextual data in their admissions process, especially for students from less privileged backgrounds to recognise the differing circumstances faced by applicants.

Three years after Cameron's speech on social mobility, his successor, Theresa May, chose not to mention social mobility but made much of the term 'meritocracy' in her opening address on the steps of number 10 on 9<sup>th</sup> Sept 2016 (Gov.uk, 2016):

'I want Britain to be the world's great meritocracy – a country where everyone has a fair chance to go as far as their talent and their hard work will allow.'

Whilst the Prime Minister's words were largely applauded by both political sides of the press, fourteen months after her speech, the entire committee of the SMC resigned in protest at the lack of progress towards a 'fairer Britain'. As reported in the Daily Mail 4<sup>th</sup> December 2017:

'Alan Milburn, the former Labour minister who headed the commission, said he had 'little hope' the current Government was capable of making the changes necessary to deliver a more equal society.'

What was being done, if anything, to make Britain more meritocratic? If we return to Theresa May's inaugural speech a year earlier in September 2016, she had stressed there 'was no better place to start [meritocracy] than in education' and she promised 'as long as I am Prime Minister, the pupil premium for the poorest children will remain.'

The pupil premium was launched in 2010, as the Coalition government's flagship attempt to bridge the country's chronic educational attainment gap between the poorest and richest pupils. It amounts to a grant of £1320 per pupil per annum in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) in primary school and £935 in secondary schools (FSM being the government's index for comparative disadvantage).

The Educational Endowment Foundation (EEF) was established by the Sutton Trust (ST) in 2011 and received a founding £125 million grant from the Department of Education (DfE) with aims to raise the attainment of children facing disadvantage by identifying promising educational innovations. Since its conception, the EEF has identified pupil 'self-regulation' and 'character building' as the key to bridging the imbalance between the life outcomes of rich and poor students. This allies EEF objectives with Expectancy/Value Theory (EVT) and Self-Regulation Theory (SRT) by concentrating upon learner characteristics rather than pedagogical processes. The emphasis here is on the child's own performance.

### **3.2 Teaching and Learning Toolkit: Mindset and Character**

The EEF aims to raise the attainment of children facing disadvantage by:

- 'Identifying promising educational innovations that address the needs of disadvantaged children in primary and secondary schools in England.'
- 'Evaluating these innovations to extend and secure the evidence on what works and can be made to work at scale.'
- 'Encouraging schools, government, charities, and others to apply evidence and adopt innovations found to be effective.'

(The Sutton Trust, 2017b)

By 2012 character education was already recognised by British business leaders as a desired outcome for students:

'...there is a set of behaviours and attitudes, a kind of social literacy that we must foster. An exclusive focus on subjects for study would fail to equip young people with these,

though rigour in the curriculum does help. These personal behaviours and attitudes, sometimes termed character, play a critical role in determining personal effectiveness in their future lives, and should be part of our vision.’ (CBI First Steps Report 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2016)

In 2015, four years after its conception, the EEF produced a ‘tool kit’, which is a guide for schools to the most effective use of the pupil premium to support disadvantaged pupils. (The Education Endowment Foundation, 2018). The tool kit was devised largely in response, as mentioned above, to calls from business leaders (CBI First Steps Report 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2016) and the work of Gutman and Schoon (2013), who produced a literature review into *The impact of non-cognitive skills on outcomes for young people* for the EEF and The Cabinet Office (2013). The key findings of Gutman and Schoon’s report for the EEF revealed that there were signs of promise that non-cognitive skills had an impact on positive outcomes for young people; factors such as self-control and school engagement were correlated with academic outcomes:

‘Children’s perception of their ability, their expectations of future success, and the extent to which they value an activity influence their motivation and persistence leading to improved academic outcomes, especially for low-attaining pupils.’ (Gutman and Schoon, 2013, p.44)

In the above quote we have a clue that Gutman and Schoon are alluding their findings with EVT. According to EVT, an individual’s behaviour is a function of the expectancies one has of an activity or task and the value of the goal toward which one is working. The behaviour chosen will be the one with the greatest combination of expected success and value. But Gutman and Schoon (2013) acknowledged that less is known about how far it is possible to develop a young person’s non-cognitive skills through intervention. Their report placed little emphasis upon the role of schools and adults promoting activities that children can value.

At the exact same time that the EEF toolkit ‘evaluating school interventions’ was launched, the government published their Changing Mindsets Evaluation report in June 2015. This project sought to improve academic attainment by supporting pupils to develop a growth mindset and thus aligning their emphasis mostly with SRT. The EEF’s Changing Mindsets Evaluation report (2015) builds on the research by Dweck (1999) and her colleagues on the perceptions that children hold about their personal intelligence, whether it is a ‘fixed entity’

(for example, I'm useless at that and always will be) or a 'malleable quality' (for example, I can improve and get better). According to the EEF's Changing Mindsets Evaluation report (2015), possessing a 'growth mindset' is seen to create resilience when faced with failure or difficulties in learning. A growth mindset sends a child positive messages about effort and strategy, leading pupils to try harder, or to try a different strategy for learning. In comparison, for children with a fixed mindset, failure will send a negative message about who they are. Experience of failure with a fixed mindset will damage a child's self-esteem and is likely to lead them to avoid the same task in the future. These concepts were first identified by Seligman as 'learned helplessness' (Seligman et al., 1968), which is the perception that an obstacle is impossible to overcome due to multiple failures in the past. In contrast, individuals who are 'mastery oriented' use failure to motivate themselves. These individuals are said to be resilient to challenge and failure (Blackwell et al., 2007; Dweck, 1999).

The EEF produced their 'toolkit' for schools in 2015. The government's toolkit had been compiled through £3.5 million of grant funding to the EEF to support promising approaches to *character building*, which is believed will help allow poorer pupils to emerge from education better equipped to 'thrive in modern Britain' (Gov.uk, 2015a). Nicky Morgan (Secretary of State for Education from July 2014 – July 2016) was confident that the outcome of these interventions 'will cement our position as a global leader in teaching character and resilience' (DfE 2015).

In the same year (2015) as the Changing Mindset Evaluation project, the Department of Education, invited schools to apply for £3.5 million grant funding for 'character education', which coincided with the launch of the pupil premium school's intervention tool kit. The DfE were committed to helping schools ensure that children develop a set of character traits that would help 'poorer students to emerge from education better equipped to thrive in modern Britain'. Character attributes were deemed to be:

'perseverance, resilience and grit confidence and optimism  
motivation, drive and ambition neighbourliness and community spirit tolerance and respect  
honesty, integrity and dignity conscientiousness, curiosity and focus.'

(Department of Education, 2015)

The tool kit lists thirty-four interventions, each of which is given a numerical score. The rating system was judged on how many months advancement in academic progress a

student was likely to receive from participating for a year within each intervention (EEF, 2018).

In the following section I will report the highest scoring interventions, as judged by the EEF tool kit.

### **3.2.1 Feedback, Meta-Cognition and Self-Regulation**

Thirty-four interventions are listed in the EEF toolkit for schools as promising approaches to *character building*, which is believed will help allow poorer pupils to emerge from education better equipped to ‘thrive in modern Britain’ (DfE 2015). Each intervention is given a score related to how effective it is thought to be, given in the form of average progress in months that the intervention is likely to yield given 1 year of intervention participation; for example, a score of ‘+1’ means ‘an average of 1 month additional progress is likely for a child.’

*Feedback* (+8) scored the most highly in its effectiveness. The EEF’s toolkit’s second most effective school intervention is *meta-cognitive and self-regulation* (+7). Meta-cognitive and self-regulation is linked to SRT, which is heavy on description of outcomes. The EEF reported that evidence suggested the use of ‘metacognitive strategies’, which induce pupils to think about their own learning, can be worth the equivalent of seven months’ progress for one year’s participation. Whilst the EEF recognises ‘metacognitive strategies’ to be particularly beneficial for disadvantaged pupils, the EEF also acknowledges that less is known of how to apply ‘metacognitive strategies’ in the classroom; the how is missing. Instead, the EEF report on the Guidance Report on Metacognition and Self-Regulated Learning, the EEF quote from Zimmerman (2002) on what a self-regulated learner should look like:

‘These learners are proactive in their efforts to learn because they are aware of their strengths and limitations and because they are guided by personally set goals and task-related strategies, such as using an arithmetic addition strategy to check the accuracy of solutions to subtraction problems. These learners monitor their behaviour in terms of their goals and self-reflect on their increasing effectiveness. This enhances their self-satisfaction and motivation to continue to improve their methods of learning.’

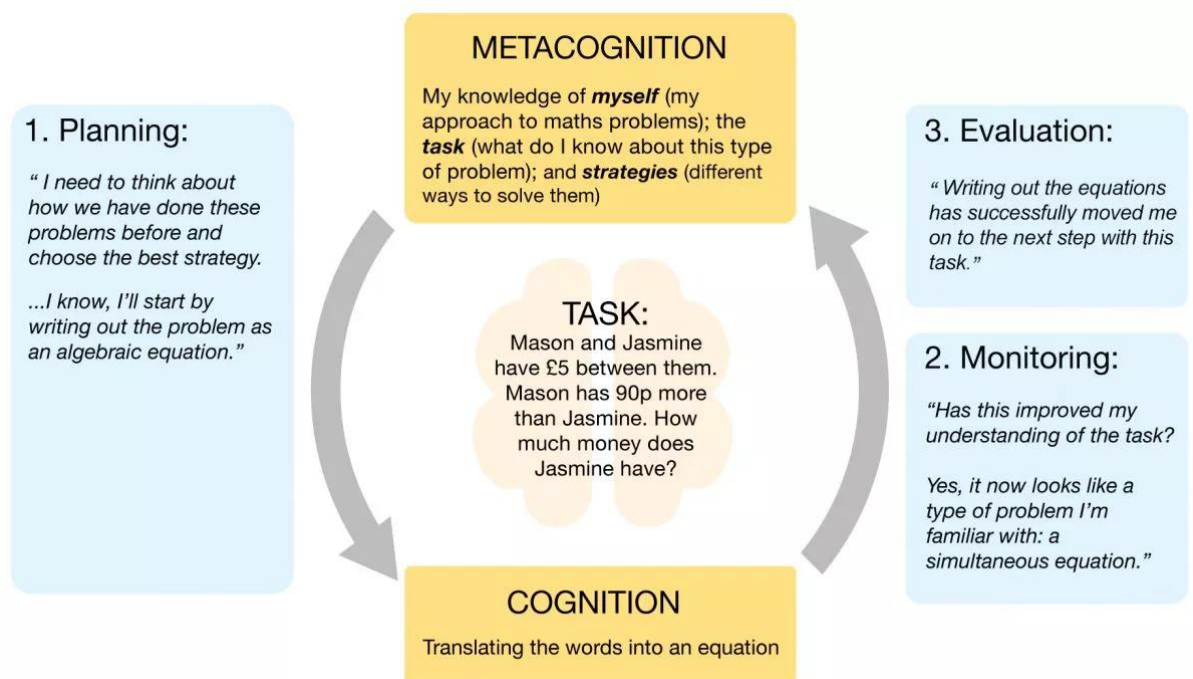
(The Education Endowment Foundation, 2018, p.8)

In 2015, the SMC agreed that the effective mastery of social and emotional skills (SEL) – the SMC’s nomenclature for *meta-cognitive* and *self-regulation* – was essential in



achieving good life outcomes (The Social Mobility Commission. The State of the Nation, 2015). The SMC highlighted six school programs as demonstrating significant impact on children and young people’s social and emotional skills: PATHS (Providing Alternative Thinking Strategies), Friends, Zippy’s Friends, UK Resilience, Lion’s Quest, and Positive Action, (The Social Mobility Commission. The State of the Nation, 2015, p.5). These programs are classroom-based and teach students: ‘how to think about themselves’ (Positive Action); to apply the knowledge taught ‘to understand emotions’ (Lion’s Quest); and ‘teaches participants to cope with their feelings by training them to think more positively about themselves and how to relax and regulate their bodies’ (Friends for Life). For a fuller description of PATHS, Positive Action and Friends (see **Appendix Six**). These programs are closely linked to SRT.

The following diagram illustrates the EEF’s self-regulated learner and the process of thought strategy that is employed by the pupil, rather than the teacher:



**Figure 1.** EEF The Self-Regulated (The Education Endowment Foundation, 2018)

The EEF’s explanation of this diagram is not rich upon how metacognition and self-regulation can be achieved by teaching interventions. The report says that that most learners will go through thinking processes when trying to solve a problem in the classroom.

‘The most effective learners will have developed a repertoire of different cognitive and metacognitive strategies and be able to effectively use and apply these in a timely fashion. They will self-regulate and find ways to motivate themselves when they get stuck. Over time, this can further increase their motivation as they become more confident in undertaking new tasks and challenges’ (The Education Endowment Foundation, 2018a).

In conclusion, the report acknowledges that perhaps teachers and schools cannot be responsible for metacognition and self-regulation: ‘The extent to which skills are acquired is in part dependent on the opportunities pupils receive to develop them outside of school and in the home, which is likely (though not necessarily) to be correlated with social background’ (The Education Endowment Foundation, 2018).

### **3.2.2 The tool kit and extra-curricular activities**

Of the thirty-four school interventions listed and evaluated in the EEF toolkit, two are specifically related to ECA: Arts participation (+2) and Sports participation (+2) (an average of 2 months additional progress for one year’s participation).

In November 2017, this tool kit was revised, specifically within the area of Arts Participation, following further research into the effectiveness of the ‘Impact of arts education on the cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes of school-aged children’ (The Education Endowment Foundation, 2017a).

The EEF concluded in November 2017, after consulting 199 studies of music education and a combination of art forms (conducted mostly in primary schools), that there was ‘no convincing evidence demonstrating a causal relationship between arts education and young people’s academic and other wider outcomes.’ (The Education Endowment Foundation, 2017a, p.5).

In December 2017, the EEF revisited the domain of ECA with the Children’s University, a trial program jointly funded by the Cabinet Office and the EEF, aimed at improving the aspirations, attainment, and skills of children by providing a range of learning activities outside school hours in the form of after-school clubs (The Education Endowment Foundation, 2017b) The idea behind this program was to give ‘more control of their learning aims through experience and action, rather than being taught in a classroom’ (p.6).

The trial focused on children in Years 5 and 6 (aged 9–11) in the North of England in schools with a higher proportion of disadvantaged children and attainment levels lower than the national average (DfE 2017). Sixty-eight primary schools participated in the trial from

March 2014 until July 2016. 2,603 children volunteered to take part and selected the activities they wished to attend, with the target of completing at least 30 hours of activity per year. But as children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to participate in activities such as after-school clubs, arts and cultural events, volunteering, and community-based projects (Southby & South, 2016), there was a low uptake from FSM children and the authors failed to provide either numbers of FSM participants or percentages of ECA uptake in the report.

The project evaluated the impact of after-school club participation on the volunteers' reading and maths in Key Stage 2 tests, and on non-cognitive outcomes such as 'teamwork' and 'social responsibility' measured through an attitude survey.

Key conclusions:

1. The volunteer children in the trial made 2 additional months' progress in reading and maths compared to children in the other schools.

2. The volunteer children in the trial made small gains in 'teamwork' and 'social responsibility' compared to children in the other schools.

3. The FSM children [no numbers or percentage of overall children given]<sup>1</sup> in the trial made 1 additional month's progress in maths, which is less than the group as a whole, and no additional progress in reading. Small gains in 'teamwork' and 'social responsibility' were measured compared to FSM children in the other schools. The smaller number of FSM pupils means these results are less secure than the results for all pupils' (The Education Endowment Foundation, 2017b).

In the light of these conclusions, in November 2017, the EEF toolkit maintained Sports Participation and Arts Participation both at +2, which placed them joint 21<sup>st</sup> of the 34 interventions judged to improve the outcomes of poorer, disadvantaged pupils.

### **3.3 The Pupil Premium State of Affairs**

The prospects of improving the academic outcomes of poorer students is still grim at the time of writing. Despite six years since the introduction of the pupil premium initiative, progress in improving the outcomes for poorer students is still negligible. In July 2018, the Education Policy Institute published their annual report in which the chapter headings provide a stark synopsis of the findings (The Education Policy Institute, 2018a).

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<sup>1</sup> Present author's insertion for clarification

- Overall, there is little change in the disadvantage gap (p.9).
- Based on current trends, the gap at the end of secondary school would take over 100 years to close (p.11).
- The gap for persistently disadvantaged pupils has remained broadly unchanged since 2011 (p.13).

This chronic impasse on levelling the educational playing field for all children prompted four SMC commissioners to resign 'Due to Little Hope of Fairer Britain' as reported in the Guardian 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2017. In response to four Social Mobility Commissioners resigning, in December 2017, the SMC immediately produced a Social Mobility Action Plan entitled 'Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential. A plan for improving social mobility through education.' (Gov.uk, 2017). This was presented to Parliament (Gov.uk, 2017) by the Secretary of State for Education, Justine Greening (who resigned from the post a month later in January 2018). In what the commission called 'Levelling up opportunity', the commission identified both the quality of teaching and effective use of the Pupil Premium. The Secretary of State for Education Justin Greening was urging schools to use their Pupil Premium fund effectively by consulting the EEF to see 'what works.' Despite the recognition of the quality of teaching and providing out of class experiences as part of a broad and rich curriculum, the emphasis was still firmly on pupil's character formation.

This focus on character was confirmed further on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2018 with the EEF publishing a report entitled '15 Key lessons learned in first six years' in which 'character' formation in children and young people was recognised as 'a major focus of work for the EEF.' This only emphasised the extent to which student dispositional outcomes had been the 'major focus'. How these character traits could be formed within a school context had been largely disregarded, and this at least was acknowledged.

'whilst the report recognises essential life skills or 'character' as important in determining life chances... Much is less known about how these skills can be developed...'  
(The Education Endowment Foundation, 2018b, p.18).

There were signs too, that recognition of the causes of lower academic outcomes for poorer students were not 'character' deficiencies in students, but due to differences in environments starting very early in life. The drivers of this disadvantage gap, according to the

Education Policy Institute 2018 report, are not ones of mindset and character but one of inequality determined by:

- ‘Maternal health and well-being from conception onwards
- Inequalities in the physical and social home environment, including the quality of family relationships, the home learning environment and child-rearing strategies.
- Access to high quality early years education’

(The Education Policy Institute, 2018b).

In 2017, the SMC calculated that poorer students were twenty-seven times more likely to attend a failing school (The Social Mobility Commission, 2017). There were also signs that the importance of ECAs was at last being acknowledged as a vital component of education. In 2018, The Education Policy Institute stated that ‘Differential experiences of disadvantaged pupils in school including out-of-classroom educational programmes...’ and recognised that ‘Widening access to these protective experiences should be part of an in-school strategy to tackle the attainment gap.’ (The Education Policy Institute, 2018b). The Education Policy Institute in their 2018 Annual Report 2018 for England, concluded that there were:

‘Structural differences between schools with a high intake of disadvantaged pupils, including quality of teaching and classroom practices and access to a broad curriculum including careers advice and out-of-classroom educational programmes.’

‘The evidence supports the benefit of out-of-classroom learning experiences, particularly outdoor adventure learning, for determinants of attainment that may particularly benefit disadvantaged pupils, including self-esteem and self-efficacy. However, extra-curricular activities are more likely to be accessed by more affluent pupils, with disadvantaged pupils less able to access opportunities both in and outside of school. Additionally, arts participation is generally associated with modest attainment gains, and may be particularly beneficial to disadvantaged pupils; however, these pupils disproportionately

lack access to a broad curriculum. Widening access to these protective experiences should be part of an in-school strategy to tackle the attainment gap.’

(The Education Policy Institute, 2018, p.19/20)

The EEF, The Education Policy Institute and the SMC all recognise the quality of teaching as ‘(t)he single biggest factor in improving outcomes at school’, especially ‘for children from more disadvantaged backgrounds’ and of broadening access to protective experiences, such as extra-curricular activities. However, the EEF appear to ignore this and their tool kit stresses that it is a child’s meta-cognition and self-regulation that are the key factors to accomplishing better health and better social and educational outcomes. This emphasises the work of Seligman (1975, 2005) and Duckworth and Gross (2014), identified in the previous chapter, who argue that, it is personal qualities of ‘grit’ and self-control that are more predictive of academic performance in pupils, in addition to teaching quality.

The increasing attention from policymakers on how ‘character’ can be developed in children and young people has positioned resilience in schools as a character trait or mindset that that should be adopted by pupils. However, there is a distinct lack of knowledge of how processes/methods/practices may improve such attributes. This has given rise to a growing criticism of the notion of resilience as conspiring with a neoliberal agenda in making individuals accountable for their own resilience (Arfken & Yen, 2014; Prilleltensky, Prilleltensky, & Voorhees, 2008). In an environment of increasing economic austerity and diminution of government run services, individual responsibility has increasingly become viewed as a consumer choice. In education, as illustrated by the EEF toolkit, there has been a shift in concentrating less on the costlier means of ensuring quality educational experiences and focussing more upon the responsibility of children to develop their own ‘character’ fit for learning. Botrell (2013) refers to this consumer choice as a ‘responsibilisation’ of the individual to make the best on offer. This has caused some academics to question the use of the word resilience, as a social Darwinian notion of the survival of the fittest (Parens, 2018). Freidl (2009) maintains that, ‘A focus on resilience cannot adequately explain inequalities in health and wellbeing and may serve to disguise or distract from analysis of social structures that result in and maintain inequalities in power, wealth and privilege.’ (p.22). Similarly, though replacing resilience with well-being, Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2005) identify at a macro-societal level the importance of understanding that ‘Wellness cannot stand by itself. Unless it is supported by fairness and equality, it is bound to fail.’ (p.18).

Supporting Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky's (2005) argument of macro structural reform, the Centre of Resilience for Social Justice & Boingboing (2019), based at my own university, have vigorously entered the debate on the effectiveness of teaching character in schools to reduce the attainment gap between richer and poorer students. In a response to the Department for Education consultation 'Character and Resilience: Call for Evidence' (Department of Education, 2019) the Centre of Resilience for Social Justice & Boingboing (2019) argue that teaching character and resilience to pupils is in danger of making the pupil responsible for adopting the correct character rather than recognising that building resilience and character in childhood and adolescence is fundamentally shaped by environmental factors and levels of inequalities. Instilling a mindset of 'I can achieve' fails to acknowledge that for many children and young people in the UK, the odds of them succeeding are stacked against them. It is not meddling in the character of our poorest pupils that is required but structural reform to reduce inequality.

'When overcoming the odds is erroneously viewed as simply a matter of individual motivation or grit, the failure to succeed is perceived as the fault of the individual... Many economic, education, health, and social policies that address the effects of adversity in individuals do little to create the conditions that are known to build greater resilience'.

(National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015, p7).

According to Apple (2014), thriving in modern neoliberal Britain depends upon the ability to negotiate and 'survive', where the provision of security and well-being is no longer the responsibility of the state and unpredictable futures of work, opportunity and social mobility are not guaranteed. This equates closely with Ungar and colleagues (2007) notion of an individual's ability to 'navigate' towards and 'negotiate' for resources. Apple (2014) identifies character education as another aspect of the Conservative government's redefinition of social justice and equity in that it constructs the individual's hopes, goals, self-esteem, and worth, as the causes and remedies to social problems. Underachievement has become redefined; no longer is it linked to group oppression and disadvantage, but "under the conditions of a 'free market'.... [Underachievement] once again increasingly is seen as largely the fault of the student." (Apple, 2014, pp 19–20).

The National Education Union found that 'In-work poverty, housing issues such as high rents, homelessness and insecurity, as well as fears about how matters would deteriorate with Universal Credit ... are having a parlous effect on the learning of children living in

poverty' (National Education Union, 2019). This situation is compounded by the funding crisis in education, which results in schools being less and less able to counter the impacts of disadvantage on education. These impacts are viewed consistently across primary, secondary and college sectors. According to the National Education Union (2019) 97% of respondents in state schools, academies, free schools and further education colleges believed that poverty affects their students' learning. Of these respondents, 52% believed that the poverty effect was large. Respondents also reported that the situation was worsening. Half the respondents said that things had become worse or significantly worse since 2016. Only 2% thought the situation had improved since 2016. This deterioration was felt to be slightly more marked in primary schools. In a multiple-choice questionnaire, the impacts on learning attributed to poverty were identified as fatigue (78% of respondents), poor concentration (76%) and poor behaviour (75%).

In the UK, Scotland has taken the initiative with the Times Educational Supplement (TES, 2019a) reporting that 'The Scottish government's top priority is to narrow the poverty-related attainment gap – the gulf between disadvantaged and affluent pupils when it comes to the school qualifications they gain.'

However, according to the Educational Institute of Scotland (2019), whilst awareness has grown in recent years of the impact of disadvantage on education outcomes, few teachers have direct experience of poverty and its consequences. To ensure all Scottish teachers are aware of the impact of poverty on learning, the Scottish government and the Educational Institute of Scotland have joined forces to create a booklet entitled Face up to School Poverty (2019). The booklet highlights that schools should be aware and understand the barriers that pupils from the poorest families face and should take action to remove these barriers as much as possible. The booklet focusses on five areas where schools can take action to remove poverty barriers:

'Ensuring that children who may be at risk of hunger are included within breakfast clubs' (p.3).

'Considering ways in which uniform could be made less expensive for all families' (p.4) "Making classroom resources available on a daily basis for all children and young people to use' (p.5).



‘Avoidance of planning class lessons for which pupil participation is wholly dependent on the completion of homework/out of school learning activities’ (p.10)

‘Retaining a special fund to cover the cost of school trips for pupils whose families cannot afford to pay’ (p.12).

Access and participation in ECA, outside school trips and Breakfast Clubs, is not considered a factor.

As Bronfenbrenner argued, the level of successful coping that an individual demonstrates cannot be purely a result of personal traits as environmental factors also facilitate or hinder adaptation to adverse circumstances. Using an inequality focus we can begin to understand how exterior social forces affect the psychological capacities and responses of individuals. If we replace terms such as ‘self-regulation’, ‘mindset’, ‘character’, ‘essential life -skills’, ‘social and emotional skills’, ‘meta-cognition and self-regulation’, with ‘resilience’, with an understanding that resilience is not solely the child’s cognitive adjustments but also a result and process of the child’s ecology, then we can begin to acknowledge that it is the degree or level of resilience inside the child’s ecology that shapes the child’s developmental pathway. We must, therefore, look first at what is in place, and what needs to be in place. The lens of this thesis, therefore, turns upon the practitioners, their practices and perceptions of these activities, rather than the child. It is, after all, the resilience of the child’s ecology that determines opportunity and choice of routes. It is what a child does and with whom that matters. If this relational base is secure, it may offer a passport to new social contact in new contexts (Aranda & Hart 2014; Masten, 2001).

### **3.4 A Recent Turn in Policy and Recommendations towards ECA**

During the writing of this thesis, there has been a reappraisal of how success in school should be judged. There is new focus upon schooling as being judged not solely upon academic performance but a more holistic approach to development. Since the latter months of 2018, there has been ‘an evolutionary shift’ to rebalance the inspection of schools ‘to look rather more closely at the substance of education’ (Ofsted, 2019). The new Ofsted education inspection framework, rolled out in September 2019, will measure school factors that seem to make a difference by ensuring that pupils achieve academically and in areas such as sports or

arts. The new Ofsted framework introduced a new category of ‘personal development’ whereby the curriculum must enable learners ‘to develop and discover their interests and talents.’ (p.12) As reported in The Telegraph (2019), in proposing to have a stand-alone category for ‘personal development’, Ofsted will encourage schools to prioritise extra-curricular activities.

Though Ofsted inspectors will want to know that each student has the opportunity to engage in ECA, this does not guarantee the engagement of those students who might most benefit. In 2017, The Sutton Trust reported that thirty-seven per cent of secondary pupils do nothing except their formal academic studies in school, taking part in no clubs or activities whatsoever (The Sutton Trust, 2017a). Providing opportunity to participate is not enough. Ensuring engagement of those pupils who historically do not participate is another matter and the subject of this thesis.

However, there is now a recognition of the value of ECA and the experiences that ECA participation may bring to building pupil resilience or character in school. This detection of ECA being a valuable route to resilience, especially for Pupil Premium (FSM) students, represents a new departure for the Department of Education and Ofsted.

In the weeks before submitting my thesis, the Department of Education (2019b) published their report into character formation in schools. These recommendations draw on a written call for evidence held between 27 May and 5 July 2019 ‘Character and Resilience: Call for Evidence’ (Department of Education, 2019), as mentioned in this chapter.

The findings and their implications chartered in my thesis in the next chapters appear to be a vanguard to a substantial amount of recommendations put forward in this report. The report acknowledges ECA as a valuable source of pupil development that schools should embrace. In fact, the term extra-curricular has now been superseded by ‘co-curriculum’, that is to say, ‘planned provision that the school makes for pupils which sits alongside lessons’ (Department of Education, 2019b, p. 5). Gone is the pre-fix of ‘extra’ which suggested additional, bolt on and supplement. The report asks schools to consider their curriculum provision:

‘Does it cover a wide range across artistic, creative, performance, sporting, debating, challenge, team and individual etc. so all pupils can both discover new interests and develop existing ones?’ (p.5)

‘Is provision of high quality and does it challenge pupils and build expertise? Is participation sustained over time?’ (p.5)

‘Are there ample opportunities for pupils to compete, perform etc., and is success acknowledged and celebrated?’ (p.5)

‘Do we understand and reduce barriers to participation (for example, cost, timing, location, logistics, confidence, parental support etc.)?’ (p.6)

‘Do we enable young people from all backgrounds to feel as if they belong and are valued?’ (p.6)

‘Is our provision, including our co-curricular provision, appropriately tailored both to suit and to challenge the pupils we serve?’ (p.6)

The report cites (Chanfreau et al., 2016) in suggesting that schools that develop character help drive equity and social mobility for their pupils. However, I note that the research by Chanfreau and colleagues did not focus on ‘character’ but on whether participating ‘in out of school activities during primary school is linked with end of primary school attainment and social, emotional and behavioural outcomes, for all children and specifically for children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds’ (p. i).

What is not disputed is the Department of Education (2019b) reports endorsement of ECA. It advises that the provision of the co-curriculum should focus on high quality activities across a wide spectrum such as cultural, sporting and creative and enable pupils to participate over an extended time to learn and improve their chosen activities and compete and/or perform where appropriate. Participation in these high-quality activities should be ‘enabled for all pupils in the school, including the least advantaged pupils’ (p.8). For this to occur schools must have an understanding of the barriers to participation. Activities that offer disadvantaged pupils experiences which they would not otherwise access should be prioritised.

The report highlights how access to character development opportunities can result in more motivated pupils with fewer absences and lower levels of emotional stress. The report also stresses the importance of early introduction to co-curricular experience by citing research by the Jubilee Centre (2017) for Character and Virtues which found that children

who first get involved in service activities (participating in meaningful action for the benefit of others ) under the age of 10 were more than twice as likely to have developed a habit of service than if they started aged 16–18 years. Children beginning earlier are also more likely to be involved in a wider range of service activities and participate in them more frequently.

The report notifies schools that Ofsted inspections of schools will be considering both the quality and range of co-curricular provision and whether the least advantaged pupils take part in the co-curricular activities.

Finally, the report identifies pupil character as a complex mix of qualities, such as the ability to remain motivated by long-term goals/ a ‘tenacity’ to stick at a task. However, how these qualities are transmitted and how ECA provides these avenues for tenacity is not explained. As Chanfreau and colleagues (2016) recommended ‘more research is needed to understand the content of the after-school clubs and what it is about the experience that results in improved outcomes’ (p. ii). This thesis provides insight into how ECA can achieve resilient outcomes, that is, a child performing better than before. The notion of character is not used in this thesis. Resilience and closing the attainment gap is not about ‘character’; poorer students do not lack character. What is needed is a route to excel and thrive.

In the next section I identify a gap in the knowledge and the research aims of this thesis.

### **3.5 A Gap in our Knowledge**

Given the known benefits of ECA to disadvantaged and vulnerable children and the tendency of ECA participation to decline after the age of 11, the triggering and sustaining of ECA in middle childhood for a child who had hitherto never participated in ECA, is a gap in our knowledge that is worth exploring. This knowledge of engaging a child to persevere at an ECA will help us better understand what needs to be in place and what practices promote the best conditions and tendencies to trigger and sustain ECA engagement in middle childhood. The first research aim of this thesis is:

- To explain how extra-curricular engagement is triggered and sustained for disadvantaged children in middle childhood.

Secondly, I examine the processes and the outcomes of triggering and sustaining ECA engagement in middle childhood for a disadvantaged child who had previously never participated. I explain outcomes as life chances and levels of well-being to be dependent, and

not solely on individual trait or character, but on the quality of the environment, that is, the proximal processes within an individual's ecology. Outcomes become an interplay between an individual and these processes. For a child, beyond homelife, school is next most powerful provider of these potential proximal processes 'engines of development' (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p. 118)

Recent ecological resilience literature has emphasised resilience to be a child's ability to navigate routes towards resources (Masten & Reed, 2002; Panter-Brick & Leckman, 2013; Ungar et al.,2007). This implies that a child's resilience is equated not only by the child's ability to navigate but also by the existence of pathways or routes that are accessible and unobstructed for that child to navigate. A route may not be apparent to a child but requires signposting and a guide. In this thesis I will explore the idea that *engagement* and *resilience* are more ecologically encompassing than 'interest' 'character' or 'grit' or 'self -regulation.' Resilience may imply the route builder, the child, the journey and the destination. We need to establish the nature and direction of the route. From offering an explanation of how ECA engagement is triggered and sustained for children in Key Stage 2 facing adversity, I can then proceed towards making recommendations to what schools need to have in place in order to optimise that chances of fostering other stories of ECA success with resilient outcomes for disadvantaged children facing adversity. The second aim concentrates upon the construction of the route:

- To gain insight into what is needed for extra-curricular activities to be a resilience building process.

## Chapter 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter explains both my methodology and my method of data collection. I justify my choice of critical realism as a research methodology and begin with an introduction to the philosophical underpinnings and key elements that helped me choose critical realism as my methodology to investigate my research aims. I explain the three domains of external reality and the layered ontology of critical realism and how these layered domains provide the explanation of events that are possible in critical realist research. Within this layered ontology of reality, I discuss the use of interpretation and perceptions as a conduit to theoretical understanding. I explain my research criteria and the use of interviews, thematic analysis and what constitutes a theme. I discuss how critical realism uses theory, through the process of abduction, to help explain the reality that is only partially unveiled by interviews. This chapter also considers the role of retrodiction in critical realism in determining what needs to be in place to optimise the tendency of events highlighted in the interviews happening again.

Deciding on the appropriateness of a chosen methodology and its philosophical underpinnings is an essential component of rigour in research designs (Appleton & King, 2002). Trigg advocates that the philosophical groundwork must be undertaken before the researcher approaches the ‘doing’ phase of the research and states ‘the philosophy of the social sciences cannot be an optional activity, indulged in by those reluctant to get on with real empirical work. It is the indispensable starting point for all the social sciences’ (Trigg, 2001, p.255).

To better understand the role that adults and children in schools might play in the triggering and sustaining of ECA, I required a methodology that would allow me to investigate and explain processes of engagement and building resilience through ECA. Three features from my research aims indicate my stance on methodology. Firstly, I believe that there is a shared external reality. I believe that this external reality is in principle knowable and yet remains, and as Benton and Craib (2011) argue, open to being changed through research and investigation. Secondly, I believe that an avenue to at least partially explaining this external reality can be achieved through analysing practitioner perceptions, where these perceptions are grounded in a shared external reality, albeit one that is variously and differentially experienced and interpreted. Thirdly, through analysis of these perceptions I believe it is possible to provide theoretical explanation for events. This is why I chose

critical realism as a methodology rather than more interpretive understandings such as interpretive phenomenological analysis as I wanted to delve beneath surface accounts to provide an explanatory account which I believe is more useful for schools. By providing a data analysis based on explanation rather than understanding unpicks the stories of success to analyse the mechanics of what has caused the events. I believed that this “how” rather than “why” approach would be more useful to schools. Critical realism allows the researcher to suggest what needs to be in place to promote tendencies for other events e.g. successful ECA engagement for a disadvantaged child to occur.

These methodological beliefs are consistent with my desire to produce conclusions from my findings that may be useful for schools in repeating further success in ECA engagement for disadvantaged children in middle childhood. My own epistemological beliefs have been informed by the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911). Initially, Dilthey argued that the study of human behaviour should be based on the method of understanding (*verstehen*) to grasp the subjective consciousness of the participants, while the study of natural phenomena should seek causal explanation (*erklaren*). In his early work, Dilthey thought that the foundation of the social sciences would be descriptive psychology, an empirical account of consciousness devoid of concerns with causal explanation. However, he later came to see the limits in this approach and turned to what would now be considered interpretive phenomenology. But subsequently, Dilthey was convinced that interpretive phenomenology did not go far enough, and he moved from a focus on the mental life of an individual to an understanding based on socially produced systems of meaning. As Outhwaite (1975) argues, the emphasis shifts from an empathetic penetration of other people’s mental processes to a hermeneutic interpretation of cultural consequences and conceptual formations. Dilthey came to recognise that we understand ourselves only by means of our objectifications and that the understanding of *self* requires an approach from the exterior to the interior. This thesis aims to validate this journey from the exterior to the interior by explaining how a child’s resilience can only be explained by understanding the exterior factors or conditions that shape the child’s response. Like Dilthey, I came to understand the force of social factors in governing human behaviour and how the science of psychology cannot examine human beings other than from their embeddedness within society.

I came to understand this shift away from individual interpretive meaning to investigating larger structural causation, the influence of circumstances directly encountered, environmental influences, the proximal processes. Were resilience and engagement internal characteristics of a child or an emergent quality and dynamic between a child and their

environment? In this debate I wanted to understand the influence of practitioners in schools in determining ECA activity for FSM children in middle childhood and to what extent these practices influenced the child's response.

Therefore, in conclusion, I believe it is possible to provide an explanatory account about the key mechanisms to triggering and sustaining a child's ECA engagement. This presents an interpretivist epistemology and a realist ontology that includes interpreting the accounts and through the process of analysis to provide a tentative explanation that might be transferable into similar contexts. Nevertheless, due to the complex nature of social reality this explanatory account is a fallible or imperfect knowledge of reality.

## **4.2 Critical Realism**

An important principle of critical realism ontology (that is, what is real, the nature of reality) is that it is not reducible to epistemology (that is, our knowledge of reality). Human knowledge may only capture a small part of a deeper and immense reality. Critical realism therefore diverges from positivism and constructivism. For example, the founder of critical realism, Bhaskar (1998), critiqued positivism for upholding 'the epistemic fallacy' (p. 27), which is the problematic reduction of ontology to epistemology, or the limitation of 'reality' to what can be empirically known. This same critique can be applied to constructivist perspectives that view reality as entirely constructed through and within human knowledge or discourse.

Critical realism acknowledges that there is a real social world we can attempt to understand or access through social science (Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen, & Karlsson, 2002), but some knowledge can provide a greater insight of reality than others. Critical realism attempts to gain knowledge 'in terms of theories, which can be more or less truthlike' (Danermark et al., 2002, p. 10). This requires the researcher to offer a theoretical explanation for events that hold the greatest explanatory power. The ability to engage in explanation rather than engaging in thick empirical description of a given context makes CR useful for analysing and providing insight to social problems and to suggest solutions for social change.

Brannick and Coghlan (2007) summarise critical realism as having an objectivist view of ontology, which assumes that social and natural reality exist independently of human cognition. Critical realism claims that our ability to understand reality is imperfect, since it is mediated through our means of perceiving and our interpretations of it, but these perceptions



and interpretations give us a valuable insight into understanding mechanisms that generate phenomena.

How we perceive is important, in that perceptions, and particularly interpretations, may be fallible, but do not change the nature of the natural world. But in the social world, how an individual, group or society perceives and interprets a phenomenon influences and becomes part of the social world itself. If teachers believe that student ability and motivation is a natural disposition, then this will shape their practice and beliefs as to what is possible to change. Such beliefs might counter attempts to introduce pupils to voluntary activities if practitioners do not believe participation would work for that pupil.

In seeking a developmental ecological understanding of triggering and sustaining ECA engagement and the conditions (what needs to be in place) for these to be a route to resilience I required a methodology that would allow me to search for explanations that lay possibly beyond surface descriptions of interviews. The explanations of triggering and sustaining ECA engagement for a FSM-child in middle childhood may be generated by deeper mechanisms undetected by surface descriptions and, therefore, require further investigation on the part of the researcher. Fletcher, for example (2017, p.5), says:

‘The ability to engage in explanation and causal analysis (rather than engaging in thick empirical description of a given context) makes CR [Critical Realism] useful for analyzing social problems and suggesting solutions for social change.’

My understanding of resilience is informed by a recognition that resilience is not only a child’s response to adversity but the qualities of the child’s environment that may aid the child to surmount adversity (Luthar & Brown, 2007; Masten, 2006, 2009; Rutter, 2006). This understanding of resilience requires a developmental ecological perspective with resultant implications for reframing individual agency and change away from a purely psychological investigation of the child to embrace a wider socio-ecological explanation of ECA engagement and resilience building. For example, from an ecological standpoint, a child’s ability to utilise proximal processes in school requires the researcher to examine the external qualities and capabilities within the child’s ecology rather than the child’s ability to navigate and validate the access to these proximal processes themselves. This perspective has implications for both engagement and resilience theory. My second aim – to gain insight into what is needed for extra-curricular activities to be a resilience-building mechanism – implies that the social context requires the external influences of proximal processes or mechanisms

to generate engagement and resilience. The focus, therefore, lies beyond the child to examine the role of adults within the child's world, and specifically for this thesis with practitioners within the child's school.

Critical realism values first-hand accounts of lived experiences (Sayer, 2000). CR recognises that these accounts allow the researcher to provide a theoretical explanation as to the mechanisms that had generated the triggering and sustaining of the child's ECA. CR methodology would aid understanding the child's behaviour, choices, and values, as a result of their environment influences. Rather than concentrating on the child's behaviour, this ecological standpoint would provide a valuable insight into what schools should do to engage more disadvantaged children in ECA. This in effect is the constant dynamic between the environment and the individual, with the individual response being influenced by mechanisms within the environment.

### 4.3 The Critical Realist View of Reality

Critical realism acknowledges a layered or laminated nature of the social world and distinguishes between three levels of reality:

- **the empirical level** of reality consisting of experienced events (*verstehen*). For example, a FSM child decides to join their first ECA.
- **the actual level**, comprising all events whether experienced or not. At this level, there is no filter of human experience. Events occur whether or not we experience or interpret them, and these true occurrences are often different from what is observed at the empirical level (Danermark et al., 2002, p. 20).
- **the real** causal level where unseen mechanisms can generate events at the actual and empirical levels. It is the primary goal of CR to explain social events through reference to these mechanisms in the real causal level and the effects they can produce. For example, the child's perception of competence and relationship with the ECA influences their decision whether to continue/persevere or to stop participating.

It is important to emphasise the interconnectedness of all three levels of reality. As Bhaskar (1979) points out, unlike the natural world, social structures are in fact activity

dependent. In other words, causal mechanisms in the real level ‘exist only in virtue of the activities they govern and cannot be empirically identified independently of them’ (p. 48). This means that causal mechanisms are social products that can ultimately be understood through – and indeed, that exist within – phenomena at the empirical level (for example, human actions and ideas that are generated by these mechanisms), making these phenomena relevant for scientific investigation.

Critical realism allows the researcher to assemble surface descriptions or accounts of events (the empirical and actual layers of reality) with the subsequent quest to uncover the mechanisms or processes that influence or directly cause the observable actions, though they may not be visible. Though these mechanisms are invisible, we can detect their consequences. For instance, we cannot see the mechanism inherent within magnetism, nevertheless we can observe the effect on iron filings when a magnet is placed close to them. CR recognises that generative mechanisms also exist in the social world and exert forces. A school practitioner may provide valuable descriptive data of a child commencing and maintaining participation in an ECA but in their description be unaware or ignore explanation of this activity that is generated by invisible mechanisms. The researcher, therefore, becomes part of the data analysis by offering a theoretical explanation of the surface description. From this explanation of reality, the researcher can provide insight into what systems need to be in place to maximise the resilience-building route of ECA participation for other children.

A layered ontology of CR argues that the social world is characterised by emergence, whereby the conjunction of two or more features or aspects give rise to a new phenomenon, which are irreducible to those of their constituents. It is detection of generative mechanisms beneath the level of description that also allows the notion of *emergence* (or development) to enter our explanation of events. When Bronfenbrenner defined human development ‘as the person’s evolving conception of the ecological environment, and his [sic] relation to it, as well as the person’s growing capacity to discover, sustain, or alter its properties’ (p. 9) this can be understood as a process of *emergence*. The process of a child participating in a structured activity over a sustained period may provide the emergence of an identity for that child that cannot be explained merely by the constituent parts of the child and the activity. Thus, the laminated nature of the proximal forces that guide and shape a child’s behaviour produces the potential emergence (development) of a new phenomenon, from the combination of these forces.

#### 4.4 The Use of Theory in CR to Explain Reality

My method is to provide theoretical explanation for events of resilience building in middle childhood through ECA engagement. This is through analysing practitioner accounts of ECA engagement in the form of semi-structured interviews (empirical and actual layers of reality) and subsequently offering theoretical explanation of these events (real layer of reality). Critical realism research places an important role on the identification, application and development of theory. Bygstad and Munkfield (2011, p.5) define this abduction stage as ‘the theoretical re-description’ of events, which is central to application of theory in identifying mechanisms in the real domain of reality. Abduction has been defined as a process of ‘inference or thought operation, implying that a particular phenomenon or event is interpreted from a set of general ideas or concepts’ (Danermark et al., 2002, p. 205). Abduction raises the level of analysis beyond thick description of the empirical entities to a theoretical engagement in explanation, but with an acknowledgement that the chosen theory is fallible. My abduction stage, my theoretical explanation of the description of events will be presented in the Discussion in **Chapter 6**, which follows the Findings in **Chapter 5**.

The final stage of critical realist analysis is retroduction, which focuses on causal mechanisms and conditions. The goal of retroduction is to identify the necessary contextual conditions for a particular mechanism to take effect and to result in the observed empirical trends. Ginzburg (1990) traces the evolution of retroductive reasoning back to the needs of hunters. In order to track down their prey, hunters needed to develop the ability to look for clues such as broken branches, hoof marks, tufts of hair and odours, and ask themselves, ‘What does it indicate?’ When encountering unusual clues, such as new scents, they would then be able to speculate on the cause of the scent. Retroductive reasoning takes place in a similar manner in the context of scientific research, as mechanisms are postulated to account for observed phenomena via analogy, metaphor and model building (Lawson, 1989). It requires the researcher to offer an explanation for events that hold the greatest explanatory power. In an educational climate where outcomes are privileged over processes, the findings and discussion in this thesis presents an endeavour to redress the balance. My retroduction stage, an analysis of what schools need to have to encourage the tendency for these successful ECA events to re-occur, will be presented in **Chapter 8**, Implications.

Abduction and retroduction require the researcher to ask what mechanism may explain the event, in addition to what the nature of the world must be (that is, what conditions must exist) for these surface observances to occur. These two latter stages of inference,

abduction and retroduction, distinguish critical realism from other research paradigms (Bygstad & Munkfield 2011; Danermark et al., 2002) affording what Blaikie (2007) calls a 'depth realist' ontology.

#### **4.5 Critical Realism and Perceptions and Interviews**

Critical realism recognises the importance of assembling surface descriptions, that is, accounts of events to enable the subsequent quest, through abduction and retroduction, to uncover the mechanisms or processes that influence or directly cause the observable actions. Whilst this implies that the interview may not disclose real causes of action, CR acknowledges that without investigations into action as experienced by actors, we cannot begin to access the real level of explanation (Smith & Elgar, 2014) because our knowledge of the world is always mediated by discourses available to us (Sayer, 2004). First-hand practitioners' accounts contain crucial expert knowledge about the ways that particular practices within the activities/school clubs have been executed, the challenges and opportunities, and their influences on outcomes. Sayer (2000 p.141) says 'the power of narrative derives from the way in which the depiction of events chronologically, in a story, gives the appearance of a causal chain or logic and the sense of movement towards a conclusion.' The empirical and actual data provided by practitioner's accounts provides the researcher with insights into deeper structures and mechanisms that generate those events.

Implementing critical realism research design Sayer (1992, 2004) suggests an intensive study, with a limited number of cases, where the researcher analyses the interplay between events, mechanisms and structures. Furthermore, Porpora (2001) notes that critical realist explanation has tended to devote more attention to the development of qualitative research methods than quantitative approaches. One of the reasons for this may be that qualitative methods can be adapted more easily to pursue alternative lines of inquiry in the search for retroductive explanations. The key strength of qualitative methods, from a CR perspective, is that they are open ended. This may allow themes to emerge inductively, during the course of an inquiry, that could not have been anticipated in advance.

## 4.6 Open Systems and Tendency

CR layered ontology recognises the social world as an open system from which any number of mechanisms may be exercising and competing for influence or emergence of events. An open system perspective is in contrast to the notion of closed systems of controlled experiments with controlled variables and hypothesis testing. One reason we cannot set up a closed system to test human affairs is that people tend to adapt and act in different ways over and within time.

Critical realism's layered ontology also suggests that something that works in one context might not be effective in another; this has consequences for causal claims. School practice, for example, is carried out in open conditions. School practice takes place within social systems that, as Archer observes, are 'necessarily peopled' (Archer, 2010). Given the complexity and emergence of social life, critical realism recognises that the likelihood of phenomena replicating themselves, and thereby the prediction of outcomes, is problematic. Critical realism, therefore, understands that social reality plays out in open systems that have countless, highly complex, interacting factors and produce only general trends (Alderson, 2013; Bhaskar, 1998). The best we can do as social scientists, argues Bhaskar, is to look for tendencies, not certainties. These tendencies can be detected by collating the surface descriptions of events in the empirical and the actual levels of reality to potentially uncover generative mechanisms in the real domain that might explain why these events occurred. Understanding what has a tendency to work in an open system, such as a primary school, enables other schools and potential interventions to replicate the variables to suggest a tendency towards future successful outcomes.

In the previous section I have discussed my philosophical underpinnings to this thesis. I believe that, whilst reality is objective, it is also shared, and is knowable in principle. I have described critical realism's three layers of reality. I believe that an access to this shared reality can be achieved through analysing practitioner perceptions. These perceptions are an insight into the empirical reality of experiences and events that exist in the empirical and actual layers of reality. It is for the researcher to provide explanations for the events that hold the greatest explanatory power (Danermark et al., 2002).

## 4.7 The Research Criteria

So much of educational talk is about pupil learning styles, their attitudes, their love or not of schooling, and families and backgrounds. In so many ways we seek to explain why students cannot learn: whether it be their learning styles; or right or left brain strengths or deficits; a lack of attention; their refusal to take their medication; their lack of motivation; it is because they do not do their work, they cannot persevere, it is their parents not being supportive; and so on. Whilst some of these explanations are not wrong - parental expectations and encouragement are important factors - practitioners in school have the opportunity to be change agents. For those hours when children are at school there is the possibility to alter or even reverse whatever negative effects occur in the lives of disadvantaged children. Practitioners' beliefs, commitments and what they do with children has the greatest influence on pupil achievement over which educators can have control. And whilst interviews with the head teacher of SENCO may also have been beneficial, I wanted this research to investigate the coal face by exploring the accounts of those adults in schools who organised and ran the ECA and were there with the children as the story unfolded.

Assembling accounts of successful ECA engagement for children who had never participated from the adults who create, plan and structure these ECAs allows the researcher to identify threads or commonalities that link these accounts of success. I believe that 20 accounts of what were considered stories of successful ECA engagement for a disadvantaged child facing adversity provides a valuable lens into "what works". Therefore it was important to gather individual accounts of success rather than a mix of success and failure from the ECA enablers, the practitioners in the schools. This would allow me to scrutinise comparable accounts of successful ECA engagement and to extract themes that answered my research aim:

- To explain how extra-curricular engagement is triggered and sustained for disadvantaged children in middle childhood.

Children and young people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage and physiological and cerebral impairment often do well. It is important to understand how these children beat the cumulative odds that are stacked against them. Assembling stories of ECA success allowed me to shed light on what schools need to do to make things better (Hart et al. 2007) and to suggest how schools may attempt to replicate these experiences for other children. This would allow me to answer my second research aim:

- To gain insight into what is needed for extra-curricular activities to be a resilience building process.

Many of the practitioners were enthusiastic to share their account. I believe this indicates the value of the route to ECA success for the child has similar resilient outcomes for the practitioner. In hindsight, to have included a question as to whether the practitioner felt more resilient as a result of experiencing ECA success, would have been perceptive. What was also noticeable was the occasional vagueness in identifying sustaining processes for the child. Accounting for the triggering process was easier to explain than what sustained the child's engagement. The Resilience Framework provided a template and prompt to illicit sustaining processes that had earlier in the interview been partially answered and/or explained through the outcomes to the child. This I believe points to two factors: the difficulty of pinpointing sustaining and the value of the Resilience Framework to verbalise resilient building processes in schools. Given the initial difficulty experienced by some of the practitioners to articulate the sustaining processes it would have been beneficial to have introduced the Resilience Framework earlier in the interview.

Following Sayer's (1992, 2004) recommendation of an intensive study with a limited number of cases, where the researcher analyses the interplay between events, mechanisms and structures, I sought twenty accounts of ECA engagement for children in Key Stage 2 (aged 9-11) who were in receipt of FSM and judged to be facing adversity. This study was performed pre-GDPR compliance that went into effect on May 25, 2018. I was able to access schools with previous connections to my university. In conjunction with these connections, I also sent 183 emails to head teachers of primary schools throughout the south east of England, including London, asking, 'Can you think of any member of your school staff who has managed to trigger and sustain the interest (for at least six months within the last year) of a FSM Key Stage 2 child facing adversity, who had hitherto shown no interest in an extra-curricular activity?' For a full version of the email to Head Teachers (see **Appendix Two**).

The research criteria of these twenty accounts of successful triggering and sustaining of ECA were as follows:

- **Practitioner:** an adult working in a primary school and organising the ECA
- **The child:** Free School Meal (FSM), Key Stage 2 (who had hitherto not engaged in an ECA at the school) and judged to be facing additional adversity.



- **Sustaining engagement:** at least six months within the last year (2016/17).

These emails and university connections generated 22 positive responses from which I was able to match fourteen stories to my research criteria. In addition, I found a further six stories that matched my research criteria following a meeting with a government junior minister in Professor Hart's office. The minister, on hearing of my research, suggested I contact a London-based charity that ran debating clubs targeted in London schools with a high proportion of pupils in receipt of FSMs.

Upon identifying 20 candidates that fulfilled my research criteria, I sent the following email to the prospective practitioners.

'Dear xxxxx,

I would like to invite you to take part in my research study which aims to better understand how engagement in extra-curricular activities is first triggered and then sustained with a FSM Key Stage 2 child facing adversity in their life who had hitherto demonstrated no history of interest and persevering with an activity within a school setting.

You have been selected by your head teacher for initiating and maintaining a disadvantaged Key Stage 2 child's interest in an activity for at least six months within the last year. I am interested to discover the process in which you believe this child's engagement was ignited and maintained.

As part of a team of researchers at the University of Brighton committed to developing a better understanding of the concept of "resilience" and especially how to facilitate resilience for more disadvantaged children and young people, I am particularly interested in the role of extra-curricular activities in promoting well-being in vulnerable children, and to see whether this participation may manifest in better behaviour, attendance, academic achievement and general school engagement of that child.

Please read this information sheet carefully before agreeing to participate in this study.'

## **4.8 The Interview**

Eleven interviews were held at the school of the practitioner. These were conducted in an empty classroom and usually after 3.15pm when the school was less busy. The six

interviews with the Persuade mentors took place in a café at times on two consecutive days. An hour slot was reserved for each participant. The café was spacious and quiet. The participants did not encounter one another in the café. Two interviews were answered electronically. The first because upon my arrival at the school the fire alarm sounded and the school was evacuated for the day. The second was due to staff absence. One interview was conducted on the phone due to distance.

The interviews ranged in lengths from 28 minutes to 46 minutes (excluding drawing the timelines). Some of the practitioners were reminiscent of their past histories of teachers, parents, hobbies etc. This was the biggest factor in determining the length of the interview. Additional questions were used to probe data – these were mainly upon establishing what had triggered and sustained the child’s ECA engagement. The use of the Resilience Framework allowed some of the practitioners to better re-verbalise their response to triggering and especially sustaining.

I was mindful of Pawson’s (1996) recommendation that the interviewer take an active role in informing the respondent of the subject of the interview. Before commencing each interview, I reiterated to the practitioner the goals of the research.

‘I’m interested to discover about your history of teaching an extra-curricular activity and how you have successfully triggered and then sustained a disadvantaged or special educational needs child in Key Stage 2, how was their interest first triggered and how was their engagement maintained in that activity. I’d also like to discover whether you consider participating in this activity has subsequently influenced the child’s behaviour, their self-esteem and engagement with the school and if this activity participation increased the child’s resilience.’

My initial ethics application exposed issues of individual child detail that were considered a concern to the ethics panel, especially as the child would not be aware of their participation in the discussion. It was suggested that I concentrated more on the past histories of the practitioner rather than the child. In consequence of the panel’s concerns I modified my interview, whilst maintaining as much focus as I felt possible upon the story of the child’s ECA engagement. The research concentrates on practitioner practice.

The following measures were taken to safeguard the confidentiality and anonymity of the child and to mask all possible means of identifying the child or anyone else mentioned in the research. This was achieved by:

- Using the head teacher as gate keeper. The head teacher, whilst knowing the story of the child, will be well versed in the information sharing protocol of the school as well as the confidentiality and anonymity safeguarding maintained throughout the research.
- As the researcher I had no prior links to any of the schools involved in this study nor knowing any members of staff or pupils.
- Semi-structured interviews will be audio taped to be transcribed verbatim using a pseudonym for each participant and everyone taking part or mentioned.
- There would be no mentioning of names of children, staff members or schools in the writing up of the thesis. All possible identifying information in addition to names will not be mentioned during the data collection and analysis. Whilst the names of the participants and their schools will be known to the researcher they will be encoded by pseudonym so as to remain anonymous in the data-set. Names of children and other individuals mentioned in the interview will be kept anonymous.
- The transcripts of the full interviews do not appear in the final thesis.
- The data will be published in the form of a PhD dissertation with subsequent journal articles and conference papers. The data analysis will be undertaken by myself with support from my supervisors; Professor Angie Hart, Dr. S. Eryigit-Madzwamuse and Dr. J.M. Cameron, The data will be retained on my password protected university computer and with a hard copy kept in one of my supervisor's locked files and will be destroyed after 10 years.

During the interviews the practitioners were mindful of never mentioning the child by name. On two separate occasions practitioners mentioned that they wanted me to meet the child to hear the child's account which they felt would validate their own description. However, they both accepted that this was not possible. On no occasion did I meet the

child or any other children who participated in the ECA at the school where the interviews were conducted.

With a revised semi-structured questionnaire my ethics application was approved (see **Appendix One**).

The semi-structured interview is summarised as follows:

The first six questions in the semi-structured interview (see **Appendix Five**) were centred upon the past histories of the school practitioner. These questions were focussed upon discovering the levels of historic importance of constructing the practitioners' hobby interests. From Question 7, the interview focussed upon the process of triggering and sustaining the FSM child's engagement in an ECA and whether this engagement had increased the child's resilience. I asked each respondent why they had chosen their account of triggering and sustaining the interest of a Key Stage 2 child in receipt of FSM in an ECA.

The proceeding questions (see **Appendix Five**) were then flexible in an endeavour to allow the practitioner to explain/describe what they considered had triggered and then sustained the child's engagement in the school club for at least six months.

The practitioners were then asked what they thought 'resilience' to be and whether they believed the child's resilience had increased since engaging in the extra-curricular activity.

I then introduced the Resilience Framework (Boingboing, 2017) to the practitioner (see Figure 2). This practical framework in everyday language is based on resilience research and practice development that was originally developed by my supervisor Professor Hart and colleagues alongside further input from parents and practitioners. The Resilience Framework provided me with a tool to assemble everyday school processes that were used to build resilience in my twenty accounts.

Firstly, the practitioners were asked to place a tick in any of the categories within the Framework that they believed had been an aid/support in their account. I then asked the practitioners to place a cross within any box that they believed had been a hindrance to the child's engagement. This was in alliance with another feature of critical realism in the need to identify factors that may constrain the action taken by participants, in order to take steps in removing such constraints (Trigg, 2001). This allowed me to collate a picture of the most pertinent interventions or "resilient moves" (Aranda & Hart, 2015) perceived by the

entire cohort of practitioners to engagement and resilience building as well as the most poignant obstructions.

I subsequently asked each respondent if they believed there was a category missing from the Framework. I also invited each respondent to write a short sentence, or phrase to sum up the essence of their account.

Resilience Framework (Children & Young People) Oct 2012 – adapted from Hart & Blincow 2007 www.boingboing.org.uk					
	BASICS	BELONGING	LEARNING	COPING	CORE SELF
<b>SPECIFIC APPROACHES</b>	Good enough housing	Find somewhere for the child/YP to belong Help child/YP understand their place in the world	Make school/college life work as well as possible	Understanding boundaries and keeping within them Being brave	Instil a sense of hope
	Enough money to live	Tap into good influences	Engage mentors for children/YP	Solving problems	Support the child/YP to understand other people's feelings
	Being safe	Keep relationships going The more healthy relationships the better	Map out career or life plan	Putting on rose-tinted glasses	Help the child/YP to know her/himself
	Access & transport	Take what you can from relationships where there is some hope	Help the child/YP to organise her/himself	Fostering their interests	Help the child/YP take responsibility for her/himself
	Healthy diet	Get together people the child/YP can count on Responsibilities & obligations	Highlight achievements	Calming down & self-soothing	Foster their talents
	Exercise and fresh air	Focus on good times and places	Develop life skills	Remember tomorrow is another day	There are tried and tested treatments for specific problems, use them
	Enough sleep	Make sense of where child/YP has come from		Lean on others when necessary	
	Play & leisure	Predict a good experience of someone or something new		Have a laugh	
	Being free from prejudice & discrimination	Make friends and mix with other children/YPs			
	<b>NOBLE TRUTHS</b>				
	ACCEPTING	CONSERVING	COMMITMENT	ENLISTING	

**Figure 2.** The Resilience Framework.

Finally, I invited each respondent to draw a timeline of their account, marking dates of the commencement (triggering) to the completion of the activity (at least six months within the last year). In many of the stories, the child's participation was ongoing at the time of the interview. Within the timeline I asked the respondents to mark all significant moments, such as achievements and setbacks. This would allow me to compare timelines to see to what extent the twenty stories shared similar trajectories. Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson and Collins, (2005) speak of the nested structures of the environment which may or not provide a 'positive platform' for disadvantaged children and argue for the need to

document the environmental factors most likely to help children to succeed. Similarly, Hart and Heaver (2013) speak in terms of ‘positive chain reactions’, which is the setting up of activities and/or relationships that then prompt an important change in direction or help to create turning points. This concept of ‘turning points’ has much currency in the literature on human and child development (Clausen, 1995, Elder, 2018). It would seem to have a particularly hopeful value for those working with children in adversity (Hutchinson, 2018).

The interviews took place between November 2016 and March 2017. The interviews were then transcribed, and all names and places were replaced by pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality. A résumé of each interview can be consulted in **Appendix Five**.

#### **4.9 Thematic Analysis, Abduction and Retroduction**

I was guided in my data analysis by a four-step model informed by Bygstad and Munkfield (2011).

Step 1: In a critical realist context the interviews provide a “description of events...clusters of observations” (Bygstad and Munkfield, 2011, p.5) which may be made by the researcher or by the researcher’s informants. These descriptions of events are provided by the twenty practitioners who ran the ECAs.

Step 2: Coding and thematic analysis. From the description of events the researcher can move to an “identification of key components” (Bygstad and Munkfield, 2011, p.5). An important question to address, in terms of coding, is what constitutes a pattern or theme and what ‘size’ does a theme need to be? There are various measures for representing ‘prevalence’ in thematic analysis that do not provide a quantified measure, for example Wilkinson (2000) themes speak of ‘the majority of participants’, whilst for Meehan, Vermeer and Windsor (2000, p. 372), a theme is composed of ‘many participants’ and Taylor and Ussher, (2001, p. 298) talk of ‘a number of participants.’ For Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 10), the “keyness” of a theme is not dependent on quantifiable measures but in terms of whether it denotes something relevant to the research question.

I used both a deductive (that is, ‘directed’) coding process (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Fletcher 2017) that drew on existing theory and literature, and an inductive coding process intended to be receptive to new themes not identified in my literature review. Using both deduction and induction was to counter Saldaña’s (2015) caution of an

inflexible approach to coding interviews, where preconceptions of what to expect ‘may distort your objective and even interpretive observations of what is ‘really’ happening there’ (p. 146). As Braun and Clarke state (2012) it is impossible to be purely inductive, as the researcher always brings preconceptual knowledge to the data when we analyse it. My thematic analysis was a reflective process guided by the literature review; for example, from my literature review for triggering ECA I was aware of parental influences and for sustaining ECA the review had highlighted participation due to the notion of fun, enjoyment which was linked to tasks being manageable/achievable and matched to ability. Sustaining was also identified from the literature in perceptions of competence and personal achievement. However, induction was important to remain receptive to emerging concepts from the participants accounts which were independent of the literature.

Whilst not wanting to undo in the ‘openness’ of each account, in order to compare and search for commonalities between these stories (Sayer, 2004) I was cognisant of Braun and Clarke’s (2006, p. 35) step-by-step guide to a thematic analysis of the interview.

1. Having transcribed the interviews I set about reading and rereading the data, noting down initial ideas. I found that listening to the recorded interviews whilst reading provided a better impression, flow, that was aided by intonation and cadence. This process of listening whilst reading the words also helped me familiarise with the data.

2. To generate initial codes I took notes to identify and provide a label for a feature of the data that was potentially relevant to the research question e.g. ideas of improvement, progress, advancement. Braun and Clarke (2012) speak of codes that signal beyond participant meanings to provide an *interpretation* about the data. These interpretive or latent codes may identify meanings that lie beneath the semantic surface of the data and provide insight into the later stage of abduction: providing a theoretical explanation for the themes identified.

3. Developing themes. Themes identify broad topics around which codes cluster or overlap. For example, the codes of *different activities, doing not listening, out of class, going outside, sports* developed into a sustaining theme *Of Non-Classroom Experiences*. Codes of *voted, position, run by, their club, belong, attendance, join* developed into another sustaining theme - *Ownership and Responsibility*. It is important to emphasise that my themes were constructed rather than discovered. I identified two triggering themes, and six sustaining themes. Too many themes and the analysis can lose coherence.

Braun and Clarke (2012) liken researchers too sculptors in making choices about how to shape and craft their piece of stone. The stone could be turned into several variations and interpretations. Another important element of this stage is to explore the relationship between themes and to consider how these themes work together in an overall story about the data. I sought to sculptor my rock to illustrate ECA success a positive chain of events. The data does not speak for itself. As Braun and Clarke (2012, p.65) state “your job in analysing the data, and reporting them, is to tell a *particular* story about the data, that answers your research question. It is not to represent everything that was said in the data.”

Fletcher (2017) provides a description of the use of thematic analysis within CR method.

‘The thematic analysis of the twenty interviews provided me with commonalities elicited from the empirical level descriptions of the practitioners and a list of events from the actual level, aided by the timelines provided. But to detect/identify deeper generative mechanisms critical realism uses two further stages of inference: abduction and retroduction.’ (Fletcher, 2017, p. 12)

Step 3: Theoretical re-description (abduction). The abduction stage involves the researcher re-describing that which is observed, in my case the themes drawn from the interviews, in terms of (the abstracted) theory, in order to provide a theoretical explanation of the sequence of the events and the relations between things, that gives rise to the pattern of events. According to Danermark et al. (2002) the researcher should identify relevant theories and integrate them where possible, in order to increase theoretical sensitivity in order to understand the events in more depth. I was mindful in the story that I was telling, the linking of theory to themes, that the subsequent theories identified would also be coherent, and these theories adhere together in an overall story about the data.

Step 4: Retroduction: Retroduction seeks to conceptualise what the broader context must look like for the phenomena of the events to be possible (Sayer, 2010). The stage of retroduction would enable me to extend the scope of this thesis beyond a theoretical explanation to provide practical suggestions of what primary schools need to have in place to promote similar events of successful ECA engagement for disadvantaged children facing adversity in middle childhood. This would provide a practicality to the thesis by offering



schools a route to pupil resilience through practitioner leadership and practitioner practice based on the thematic analysis and theoretical explanation of these themes.

Stage 1 and 2 of the data analysis are provided in chapter 5. The abduction stage is presented in chapters 6 and 7. Chapter 8 applies retroduction in seeking to provide primary schools a guide to what needs to be in place to promote successful ECA engagement for disadvantaged children in middle childhood.

#### **4.10 Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have explained my choice of critical realism as a methodology to understand the role that practitioners play in triggering and sustaining of ECA for a disadvantaged child in middle childhood. Critical realism methodology allowed me to investigate and explain proximal processes of ECA engagement and building resilience through ECA. I believe it is possible to provide an explanatory account about the proximal processes to triggering and sustaining a child's ECA engagement. This presents an interpretivist epistemology and a realist ontology: interpreting practitioner accounts and through the process of abduction to provide a tentative theoretical explanation of the events. The process of retroduction would allow me to suggest what systems schools would need to have in place so that these resilience-building stories of ECA engagement might be transferable into similar contexts.

In this chapter I have also discussed my method of data collection using interviews of school practitioners to document a 'description of events' (Bygstad & Munkfield, 2011, p.5). These interviews are recognised as insights into the empirical and actual level of reality from which the researcher can then offer a 'theoretical redescription' (Bygstad & Munkfield, 2011, p.5) of these descriptions to explain 'why events have happened in the way they did' (Olsen and Morgan, 2004, p. 25). Finally, I have discussed retroduction as the process whereby the researcher describes what needs to be in place to encourage the tendency for these events to re-occur.

In the following chapter I present my findings from the twenty interviews. These interviews represent the 'description of events' (Bygstad & Munkfield, 2011, p.5). For a resume of each practitioner interview see **Appendix Seven**. The following chapter presents

the identified key themes, relating back of the analysis to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006), that are shared by the practitioners' accounts in the interviews.

## Chapter 5. Findings

In this chapter I present the findings from my twenty semi-structured interviews with school practitioners. I begin by providing the context of the interviews and a brief synopsis of each practitioner. The chapter records the reason why each practitioner had chosen their child to illustrate successful ECA triggering and sustaining. The chapter identifies the themes of successful triggering and sustaining. This chapter reports upon the academic outcomes of the children and the practitioners' definitions of resilience and whether they believed the child highlighted in their interview was more resilient for having engaged for at least six months in an ECA. This chapter records the practitioners' interpretation of the Resilience Framework to categorise and help verbalise practices and occurrences to re-emphasise or further articulate the events they had accounted in their interview. The chapter illustrates the sequence of events of each interview in the form of a timeline, whereby the practitioners were asked to draw a continuum of significant events and hindrances to illustrate their account. This chapter also lists the practitioners' frustrations in being prevented from performing their profession to the best of their ability. Finally, this chapter records the practitioners' past histories in the formation of a life-long hobby and unearths the strong influence of their primary school years.

This chapter is principally concerned with the first research aim: 'To explain how extra-curricular engagement is triggered and sustained for disadvantaged children in middle childhood.'

The second research aim, 'To gain insight into what is needed for extra-curricular activities to be a resilience building process', is evaluated in **Chapter 8**. This represents the retrodution stage in suggesting what needs to be in place to provide the best chance of replicating successful ECA engagement in middle childhood for disadvantaged children who have never previously participated in ECA. The retrodution stage of critical realist data analysis proceeds the abduction stage in **Chapter 6** and **Chapter 7**.

## 5.1 The Context of the Practitioners

The twenty semi-structured interviews were sourced from primary schools within the UK.

The practitioners were:

- 9 teachers
- 3 teaching assistants
- 1 SENCO
- 1 deputy head
- 6 undergraduate activity mentors

Sixteen practitioners were female and four were male. This ratio of 25% male was higher than the national average. This may be because not all the practitioners in this research were teachers. In 2015 government statistics show that females made up 84.8% of all primary school teachers and 62.4% of secondary school teachers (Gov.uk., 2015b).

The duration of teaching extra-curricular activities among the twenty respondents ranged from 2 years to 36 years and the average length working in schools was 10.68 years.

The ECAs that featured in the 20 semi-structured interviews consisted of:

Cycling, P.E., Art (2), Keep Fit, Girl's football, Gymnastics, Foreign languages, Snack 'n' Chat, Running, Baking, Debating (6), Gardening, Forestry, Football, Tag Rugby.

All quotes will be preceded with the number of the interview from which the quote derives. Below, I provide a brief overview of each interview pertaining to (1) the ECA activity, (2) whether it was free or required payment, (3) the teaching status of the practitioner at the time of interview, (4) the length that they had been running ECAs, and (5) their personal hobbies and the practitioner's evaluation of the importance of that hobby. To see the semi-structured interview see **Appendix 5** and for a more comprehensive resume of each interview see **Appendix 7**.

**Interview 1.** Art Club. £1 per hour. Miss Rowan had been a teaching assistant for 5 years and did 'a lot of art' in her free time and ran the school Art Club at time of interview. She considered art to be the way she viewed the world.

**Interview 2.** Tag Rugby. Free. Mr Yew had been teaching PE for eight years and played several sports ‘that’s always been my background’, which he considered ‘Massive. Absolutely massive’ in his life.

**Interview 3.** Art Club. Free. Miss Alder has been teaching for 27 years and had been teaching extra-curricular for the same amount of time. ‘I am a practising artist... and I feel that my teaching is strengthened by my own practice.’

**Interview 4.** Football Club. Free. Mr. Ash had been teaching P.E. for six years. Mr. Ash said that football was his hobby and that he saw it as a ‘release’ from his everyday life.

**Interview 5.** Free. Forestry school (now incorporated into the school curriculum). Miss Juniper had been a teacher for 20 years at the time of interview and her hobbies included running and yoga, which she said kept her ‘balanced.’

**Interview 6.** Bike Club. Free. Miss Sycamore had been teaching for 27 years and extra-curricular for two years. Her hobby was cycling, which she considered ‘incredibly important’ and it kept her ‘sane’.

**Interview 7.** Girls’ Football. Free. Miss Lime had been a teacher for 5 years and had taught extra-curricular for the same time. Her hobbies were football, cycling and swimming which kept her healthy.

**Interview 8.** P.E. Free. Miss Beech had been teaching P.E. for 36 years, extra-curricular for 18 years and special needs for the past 16 years. She said that P.E. has been her life, her career and had affected holidays taken, educating her own children and also impacted the relationships in her life.

**Interview 9.** Foreign Languages Club. Free. Miss Elm had worked in a school context for five years. She was currently in her third year of teaching for two and a half years. She had been teaching extra-curricular for five years. She said that her hobby was learning foreign languages, which she considered ‘massively important’ for switching off from the stress of her work.

**Interview 10.** Keep Fit. Free. Miss Poplar had been teaching for 17 years and teaching extra-curricular for 17 years. Miss Poplar believed that she didn't have time for a hobby, saying 'my main priority now is giving those leisure opportunities to my children who now partake in a really wide range of extra-curricular activities...'

**Interview 11.** Running Club. Free. Miss Birch was the SENCO at school I. She had been teaching for 27 years and extra-curricular for the same amount of time. Her hobbies included swimming and photography, which she considered to be 'massively important... a space and a place where actually we have some time for us, for our sort of mental health.'

**Interview 12.** Baking Club. Free. Miss Sycamore had been teaching for three years and had taught extra-curricular for three years. She liked promoting maths through a Baking club and enjoyed baking and perceived this hobby to destress her life.

**Interview 13.** Snack and Chat. Free. Miss Hazel had been school J's SENCO for 4 years and she counted tennis and keep-fit as her hobbies to 'keep me sane!'

**Interview 14.** Gardening club. Free. Miss Laurel had been working in schools for 12 years and at school K for the past eight. She was currently a Teaching Assistant Level 3 at the time of interview. Miss Laurel counted as her hobbies as gardening, being outside and walking her dog and she considered these activities 'really important'.

The following six practitioners were mentors for the charity 'Persuade' and were not employed directly by the schools. Therefore, they represent an external ECA intervention invited into schools. Persuade aims are to confront educational disadvantage in some of Britain's most deprived communities. To do this, Persuade recruits and trains university students to run ECA debate workshops in schools with an above average percentage of children eligible for Free School Meals. The Persuade programme aims to improve speaking, listening and thinking skills, through teamwork and leadership.

**Interview 15.** Debating Club. Free. Miss Willow had been a Persuade mentor for two and a half years and linked to sing and play the piano. She believed that these hobbies keep her 'sane'.

**Interview 16.** Debating Club. Free. Miss Cedar was a program director with Persuade. She had been mentoring for one year. Miss Cedar says that she didn't have any hobbies.

**Interview 17.** Debating Club. Free. Mr. Alder had been a Persuade mentor for two years. He considered his hobbies to include debating, music and dance, saying 'I think my hobbies have been what have really shaped most of my identity... my hobbies have really been the way I've interacted with the world.'

**Interview 18.** Debating Club. Free. Miss Holly had been a Persuade mentor for one year and considered debating (she was part of her university debating committee) and sports in general to be her hobbies. These activities were deemed 'very important.' She said that her debating helped her master English (English was not her first language) and to study Law.

**Interview 19.** Debating Club. Free. Mr. Hawthorn has been a Persuade mentor for three years and at secondary school he enjoyed coaching rugby to the younger boys and he still returned occasionally to his primary school to teach Chinese and French. He considered Persuade and coaching rugby as his hobbies which are 'Very important... your hobbies feel part of you.'

**Interview 20.** Debating Club. Free. Miss Maple had been working as a Persuade mentor for two years. Miss Marple was involved with several extra-curricular activities in her primary and secondary schools. She considered dance, piano, debating and drama as her hobbies and believed them to be 'Really important!'

## **5.2 Why this Child?**

The practitioners were asked why they had selected the particular child to talk about in this interview. The practitioners had been chosen because they could account ECA engagement for 'a FSM child facing adversity in Key Stage 2' who had hitherto not participated in an extra-curricular activity. As mentioned on p.14, FSM does not perfectly capture disadvantage or adversity. FSM is not in itself an adversity. Children in receipt of FSM provided me with an initial gateway into collating stories, but what I sought were

accounts of successful ECA engagement with children who received FSM and furthermore were judged to be facing adversity and barriers to learning. That is to say that schools were to propose stories of children who faced adversity whether by the effects of poverty and/or also through learning barriers.

All twenty practitioners referred to either an adversity or a trait that was associated with the child they had chosen. These adversities were:

- Domestic (five interviews)
- Autism (one interview)
- Partially sighted and deaf (one interview)
- Speech difficulties (one interview)
- Reluctance to speak (one interview)
- Anger issues/behaviour (six interviews)
- Shyness (five interviews)

*Anger or behaviour issues* and *domestic issues* were cited in eleven of the twenty stories. Anger and behaviour were usually associated with domestic issues. Two of the five identifications of shyness were implicitly linked by the practitioner to domestic issues. Three of the listed adversities, namely: *autism, partially blind and deaf*, and *speech difficulties* were physiological.

The undependability and fragility of mothers was a theme in four stories: one child, due to mother's mental health, was perceived to be demonstrating extraordinary resilience in walking 'a long distance' (Interview 11) on her own to attend school and the school was making an extra effort to make sure she kept engaging 'if she's doing after-school clubs, she's walking home, it's dark at four o'clock, we've tried to work with mum about that, we take her home quite often... in order for her to be able to go to clubs and go to sporting events...' (Interview 11). Three of the children in these stories were taken into care during the six-month timeline of their ECA engagement (Interviews 3,4, & 9). Two practitioners were blunt about home environment and access to ECA:

'If the parents are negative towards it, obviously at primary age it limits the children from being able to come' (Interview 10).



‘in teaching, you offer clubs and extra-curricular activities all-singing and all-dancing but unless those children – we can support them within school, but, unless there’s a structure to support them out of school, basically they’re stuffed...’ (Interview 8).

### **5.3 Key Themes of Triggering and sustaining ECA engagement**

To obtain these themes, I was guided by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 10) who recognise ‘keyness’ of a theme being not dependent solely on quantifiable measures, that is, the number of times the theme occurs throughout the twenty interviews, but also in terms of whether it denotes something relevant to the research question: To explain how extra-curricular engagement is triggered and sustained for disadvantaged children in middle childhood.

There was two dominant key themes identified in the accounts to triggering ECA engagement: (1) invitation/selection, (2) changing the timetable.

Six key themes were elicited from the interviews regarding the process of sustaining ECA engagement: 1) non-classroom experiences, 2) competition, 3) representing the school 4) Feedback, Praise (from the Practitioner) and Achievement, 5) Feedback and Praise from other Children, 6) ownership and responsibility.

Firstly, I will discuss the predominant theme of invitation/selection to triggering ECA engagement.

#### **5.3.1 The Triggering of Engagement:**

##### **Invitation/Selection**

The triggering of engagement in these stories was predominantly determined by either the school and/or the practitioner, and not the child themselves. The process of triggering was the child being invited/selected to participate in the ECA. It is important to consider the significance of this triggering theme to the findings. To what extent was this triggering process of the child being invited/selected to be expected, given the selection criterion? Let us look at the selection process. The initial email to head teachers (see Appendix Two) began by asking ‘Can you think of any member of your school staff who has managed to trigger and sustain the interest (for at least six months within the last year) of a FSM Key Stage 2 child facing adversity, who had hitherto shown no interest, in an extra-curricular activity?’ In

the Information Sheet for Practitioners (see Appendix Three) the practitioner was informed that ‘You have been chosen because you can tell the story of a FSM child facing adversity who first engaged in an extra-curricular activity in Key Stage 2.’

Finally, in the interview (see Appendix Five) the practitioner was asked ‘What triggered this child’s extra-curricular engagement?’ This does not dictate that every account of triggering ECA engagement would be the child either being invited or selected by an adult in the school. The fact that four of the children in the twenty accounts joined the activity out of their own volition, points to the array of other triggering possibilities. Let us therefore look at these four practitioner accounts of a child choosing themselves to engage. The first account concerns a boy who decided in his final year in primary school that he wanted to learn to ride a bicycle (Interview 6). The second involves a girl who joined the gardening club because her brother who had previously joined the club told her she would enjoy it and the club was only available to children in Key Stage 2 (Interview 14). In interview 1, the girl chose to join the art club after she learnt about an art competition launched by the local council. Finally, the girl in interview 7 joined the football club in year 5 because she, like in interview 14, was now old enough and she liked football. We might also imagine a scenario of a child choosing to join a club because it came into existence, or because his friends persuaded them to join.

However, the other sixteen children’s ECA engagement was triggered through invitation or selection. In interview 9 this invitation was through the chance fact that the girl had not been picked up from school and the practitioner saw the girl waiting in the Reception. Identifying a child (by the school or a member of staff) as possibly benefitting from ECA was a key triggering theme.

‘all the teachers selected children that they felt would benefit from being invited.’  
(interview 10).

Similarly another practitioner highlighted invitation as the trigger to engagement:

‘...she was approached by the Deputy Head Teacher to attend the club and invited to attend the club and she loves reading so it was something that really inspired her to go, but she had to be asked to attend rather than – it wouldn’t have been something she’d have necessarily chosen to do’ (Interview 11).

This is interesting given the reported child's existing interest in reading, yet it took the catalyst of the practitioner inviting the child for the girl to participate. Another practitioner spoke of the club deliberately targeting FSM children 'so we're targeting those children on purpose to be able to have extra learning time' (Interview 12).

### **Changing the School Timetable**

Reducing barriers to ECA engagement by changing the timetable so that the ECA became incorporated into the school day was also a triggering process. The six debating clubs (Persuade Interviews 15–20) were run within the official school timetable 8.45am – 3.15pm. The Persuade accounts involved children who had been selected by their schools to participate in a debating intervention. The Running Club (Interview 11) and Snack 'n' Chat (Interview 14) took place during the school lunch break. Providing ECA during the school timetable were seen by these schools as reducing the barriers of accessibility and attendance, especially for the children featured in these stories, who had never previously attended a school club. In interview 7 the child participated in the Forestry school club as it had become part of the school's curriculum and took place during the daily school timetable. In this case the activity of Forestry School had become compulsory for all children.

### **5.3.2 Sustaining Engagement**

Six key themes were identified with sustaining ECA engagement: (1) non-classroom experiences, (2) competition, (3) representing the school, (4) feedback, praise (from the practitioner), achievement, (5) feedback and praise from other children, (6) ownership and responsibility. I have listed these themes in the sequence in which these sustaining processes were revealed in the interviews suggesting that they represent a sequential route to success.

#### **Non-Classroom Experiences**

The practitioners emphasised the opportunity that ECA afforded to engage in 'different activities' that were considered 'fun' and 'out of class' where their child 'found other sort of like-minded children' (Interview 8). 'Fun' was frequently used to differentiate the ECA from classroom experiences. One practitioner (Interview 18), reflecting upon a very shy boy who had just begun attending the Debating Club through invitation, believed that engagement was also facilitated by the club environment affording dynamics that didn't exist

in a normal classroom setting. Another practitioner (Interview 19) tried to analyse the difference in the learning experience between classroom and ECA by suggesting it was learning through doing rather than listening. It was the experience of doing, recognising improvement, initially through praise and then through self-awareness that this practitioner believed differentiated the experiential element of ECA from classroom experiences in building resilience.

A recurrent theme was that ECA offered avenues to success that were not available in a traditional classroom setting. Several practitioners (Interviews 2,3,9, & 11) referred to ECA affording distinct and positive relationships between themselves and the child that were separate and more personal than within the classroom dynamics. For example, in Interview 9, the practitioner who was both the child's class and ECA teacher, believed that since the girl had joined the Language club her relationship with the child had grown: 'I think it [ECA]allows them to see you as more than just a teacher.'

This was also created by the presence of an outsider who was not a regular member of staff:

'we have a football coach come in, and this particular coach is really good. And he's really good with this one particular pupil as well' (Interview 4).

## **Competition**

One aspect of the differentiation between classroom and ECA was the commonality of competition. Thirteen of the twenty ECAs were structured upon competition (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20).

Competition was perceived by some practitioners as not only providing a direction to the activity, but also giving an incentive to perform.

'we're building towards this competition... then they have the competition, it usually goes very well, they'll enjoy it, they'll come back very excited and then you're talking about the next competition' (Interview 19).

One practitioner identified the opportunity to visit the Houses of Parliament and partake in a debating competition from which the child 'massively changed. She came back

from that and I think she saw maybe why she should be doing it, or at least her competitive side came into play' (Interview 20).

Another practitioner spoke of their Art Club as 'ticking along nicely' (Interview 1) when out of the blue the local council invited the school to enter a competition to produce artwork that could be displayed on hoardings around the city.

'So that sort of really gave them something to work towards and because of what I know from my own education through art I could teach them about the design brief and mood boards and rather than just the piece of work it became a process to go through to get the final piece of work and I think just that, having that opportunity to have it displayed again was really what kind of kept them going as well...' (Interview 1).

Another practitioner spoke of competition and learning to lose and overcome defeat as a resilience building process:

'You've overcome adversity, you've overcome a defeat, you've gone on to then win based on the feedback you've been given, that then works as an example for everything' (Interview 18).

In interview 17, the practitioner saw competition as the process whereby the child had gone from "being too shy to put up his hand to being consulted by his peers." This was through losing three debates but winning the fourth and being singled out for the victory.

Three ECAs were project based (Interviews 5, 9, 14).

Whilst many children's engagement had been strengthened by competition, two practitioners referred to the lack of competition being a determinant in ECA sustainment:

'...it was going outside, it was being out on the marsh and suddenly it wasn't about sports for him, because at the time that was something that was horrific, horrible, you know. PE lessons were really not a fun time for him, but at forest school there was lots of physical activity, but without it being really like about competitive sports... And just so many different opportunities to succeed that are very different to like the sort of class-based activities' (Interview 5). Similarly, an absence of competition was considered an attraction in interview 10, 'a child who was always the last to be picked and hung back and to be part of a team' enjoyed the non-competitive nature of the ECA.

Four ECA's were non-competitive (Interviews 5, 10, 12, 13).

## **Representing the School**

This sustaining theme is closely linked to the previous theme of competition. Competition was often a task or goal that involved the whole group competing against other schools, whether as a debating club or an art club. Competition and performance provided an opportunity to represent the school for some children, and experience success and pathways to success beyond the classroom. These were cited as a factor of sustaining engagement and seeing the fruits of engagement.

‘being able to achieve in an extra-curricular club... so suddenly these things that he had never done before he was being able to represent the school, so in terms of behaviour we were showing that we could trust him outside of school... that really showed him that the school valued him... This year, he was high-fiving staff as he was going to collect his certificate.’ (Interview 2)

For this child (Interview 2), who had a history of very disruptive behaviour, representing the school off-site required building relationships and trust between the child and the practitioner. The school was now ‘using the experience with this child to pinpoint other children who might benefit from representing the school.’ (Interview 2)

One practitioner (Interview 3) mentioned a child’s pride of having his work displayed by the council and standing beside some local dignitaries for a photograph:

‘He doesn’t normally like photographs. So I think that said quite a lot, you know, about his, his pride and sense of achievement.’ (Interview 3)

Another practitioner mentioned that through her ECA success, one child now represented the school and had become ‘a role model school in our school.’ (Interview 11)

In interview 7, the practitioner said that other teachers had commented on ‘a big difference in the child’s confidence.’ She believes that this was due to the child enjoying success with the girls’ football team and playing a major role in the team in which her communication with the other members has improved greatly. The child had been given extra responsibility in the club and made vice-captain for matches.

All the children mentioned in interviews 15–20 were representing their school in debating competitions.

### **Feedback, Praise (from the Practitioner) and Achievement**

Feedback was regularly cited by the practitioners as a means of sustaining the child's engagement. Feedback was especially cited by the Persuade mentors (Interviews 15 – 20). If the ECA was structured by goals and competitions, then this performative nature of the ECA provided feedback for the group feedback for the group, which would then allow each child to know and reflect on their current performance, which would allow them to create goals to help them get there for the next show. Equally, a recognition of being noticed and subsequent praise for performance was cited as a sustaining process:

‘he has acted very positively to feedback, especially positive feedback’ (Interview 15).

Recognition of improvement was considered important:

‘kids really notice that when you kind of give them praise in front of everyone so they're like, she became more motivated because I noticed that she was improving...’ (Interview 18).

Similarly, reminding the child of where they began and their progress:

‘You keep reminding them of how far they've come’ (Interview 16).

‘...when we're giving feedback we always try to find out, always try to kind of draw attention to kids that improved or that made some kind of progress, so I tried to do that with her’ (Interview 18).

There was the sense of the child requiring recognition to understand and to legitimise their progress:

‘And I think getting that kind of praise, you don't realise how much of a big impact it has on children until you watch them, like, glow for the next half an hour... he was so excited and so happy at his achievement and came back the next week with like a vengeance, and like

determined to, like, perform as well again... telling someone they've done well and, like, facilitating them doing well has such an impact on how they feel about themselves'

(Interview 15).

### **Feedback and Praise from other Children**

Praise and recognition for achievements from other children in the ECA was cited as a way in which a child's perseverance was increased. In interview 6, the practitioner spoke of the child's perseverance to learn to ride a bicycle, whilst members of staff believed he would give up:

'because sort of the first sort of failure, the first bit of sort of like falling off the bike, the first bit of sort of like, actually no this was hard work and he would, he would give up... that's what we were seriously expecting... But he didn't, he really really stuck at it'

(Interview 6).

When asked why the child had persevered, the practitioner (Interview 6) believed it was support and encouragement from the child's peers at the club and the fact that the child recognised that he was improving:

'and at the end of each session he would just have this huge smile on his face saying how much he was just really, really enjoying it and it was just, it was amazing, absolutely amazing!' (Interview 6)

Similarly, in interview 10 the practitioner believed it was the other children in the ECA who helped:

'it was run by Year 5s and 6s. They were fabulous at engaging her and at making her feel proud at what she'd achieved' (Interview 10).

In interview 12, the practitioner spoke of feedback given by other new members to the ECA. This theme of feedback from children is further developed in the following section.



## **Ownership and Responsibility**

A sustaining theme emerged of children being aware that they were club guardians. This can be considered a later stage of sustainment since club guardianship/stewardship and was something that had to be learned and earned over time.

One practitioner spoke of a boy having been voted club president: ‘one thing he really benefitted from was... having a kind of position in the club.’ (Interview 17). This boy subsequently started persuading others to join the club.

What emerged in some clubs was a type of ownership with club elders mentoring newcomers. In such instances, the role of feedback and recognising and praising achievement was performed by the guardians as well as the practitioner:

‘it was run by Year 5s and 6s. They were fabulous at engaging her and at making her feel proud at what she’d achieved’ (Interview 10).

Similarly, another practitioner said the girl’s engagement was sustained because she was given such encouragement and praise by the Year 5 and 6 children who ran the club:

‘the Year 6s I think were fundamental in that role because it wasn’t – although the club was overseen by a teacher, the club was run by children’ (Interview 10).

Responsibility of teaching other children in the ECA was equated with gaining a status within the club ‘and that achievement of being able to teach that child’ (interview 12). The practitioner recognised that peer mentoring also consolidated the peer mentor’s knowledge that they had learned ‘the correct language’ (Interview 12), the rules of the game as it were, which they were now bestowing on new members.

‘it was having a responsibility that made her want to come back and help that child have pride and be successful and actually it helped her in her learning’ (Interview 12).

Club ownership was also equated with non-classroom experiences and a sense of control:

‘... it’s their club, they decide what they want to do, they come with ideas, they share them and then we decide whether we want to do them um if anything comes up to take part in

that's part of it, anything to do with gardening, because there was an art competition' (Interview 14).

Another art practitioner (Interview 1) mentioned how the members of the art club enjoyed having a freedom to come up with their own designs rather than having them dictated to by the teacher.

Linked to ownership and responsibility, notions of belonging were expressed:

'If you feel that you belong to a place more, then you are going to want to come in and be there' (Interview 3).

This sense of belonging was also associated with feeling safe and finding one's place in school. This translated to school attendance:

'This child's attendance is 96.7% and that's a massive improvement since she started with us, so I believe she joined us midway through her primary school years and it's certainly much stronger than it was in her previous school. She wants to be at school. She sees school as a place where she's safe, she's enjoying herself, so we've seen a massive improvement in her attendance and she's sustaining that' (Interview 11).

'I mean her attendance wasn't always fabulous; she was very often late and there was an improvement in her attendance, certainly when the club was running and then on the days when she had her other clubs, so that was very positive' (Interview 10).

These later stages of ECA sustainment also saw six of the children choosing to join other school ECAs (Interview 1, 2, 5, 10, 12, & 13). One girl was now helping the practitioner run the art club (Interview 1). There may have been more examples of children subsequently joining other clubs but the Persuade practitioners (Interviews 15–20) were unable to provide such examples because, as non-members of staff, they had less knowledge of their child's school activity.

## 5.4 Timelines

The practitioners were invited to draw a timeline to illustrate and complement their interview account of the child's ECA. The timelines reveal a sequence of events in a chronological order and many of the practitioners included dates. Practitioners were asked to include significant moments that occurred during the ECA. Fifteen of the twenty practitioners provided timelines (see **Appendix Eight**). Three interviews ran out of time for the timelines and the two telephone interviews the practitioners did not provide their timeline. The remaining fifteen practitioners were presented with a piece of blank A4 paper a ruler and an assortment of coloured pens with which to draw/write the timeline of their account. There was no brief on how the timeline should be designed; this was left to the practitioner to decide.

I present the key points from these timelines from the original practitioners' copies in Appendix Eight in a sequential format. I was surprised at the apparent ease that each of the fifteen produced these timelines. They were given no notification of being asked to do this and so the following represents their ability to recollect the events, the dates and sequences and attests to a retention of detail. Timelines help us to better understand growth, change, and recurring events. Many of these timelines illustrate the sequential dynamic between triggering and the sustaining themes of competition, representing the school, feedback, achievement and responsibility. This can be considered like 'a cycle of positivity' (a term which was frequently used by one practitioner (Interview 2) or a virtuous cycle/circle (as opposed to a vicious cycle/circle). The virtuous cycle has positive results and the vicious cycle has negative results. The positive/virtuous cycle of these accounts and timelines ECA engagement may be considered as counteracting the vicious cycle of poverty and disadvantage, as highlighted in **Chapter 1**. Poverty and disadvantage have negative impacts on children's health, their social, emotional and cognitive development, and behaviour and educational outcomes.

Interviewee 1.

- Art competition. Discuss with child.
- The child 'Realising there is no right'
- Through 'experimenting' produces better quality work.
- The child wins Runner's Up prize in the national competition and has her photograph taken.

Interviewee 2.

- Sept – Dec 2014 the boy has anger issues.
- April 2015 he is given 1:1 support and shows a liking to sport.
- Sept 2015 the boy is encouraged to join the football club. He joins the football club.
- Nov 2015 boy plays in a tag rugby festival.
- Jan 2016 the boy joins the rugby club.
- May 2016 the boy is chosen to play football for the school.
- Sept 2016 the boy ‘high 5s’ teachers after winning Star of the Week for excellent behaviour.
- Dec 2016 the boy speaks to practitioner about joining the basketball club.

Interviewee 3.

- Feb 2016 the boy has home problems.
- March 2016 the boy has anger issues.
- There is a Design and Technology week at school with an Environmental project.
- May 2016 the boy is taken into care, in the same month the boy starts after school clubs.
- June 2016, after a timetable change the boy begins a 1:1 Art intervention.
- July 2016 the boy’s art work is displayed at the University of East London.
- Sept 2016 the boy is nominated for an arts award.

Interviewee 4.

- Sept 2016 the boy is taken into care.
- Sept 2016 behaviour difficulties return.
- Sept 2016 ‘Clubs and positive relationships with significant others helping to control incidences from escalating.’
- Nov 2016 after repeated exclusions due to bad behaviour a positive relationship is building between the boy and a football coach from West Ham United.

Interviewee 6.

- Early 2016 Bike Club – the boy comes with mum. He can barely pedal across playground and gets very frustrated.

- Sept 2016 finds one of the cycling activities difficult and went and hid in trees. He said he wanted to stay and practice on his own. Given the opportunity to practice on his own and by the end of the session he was successful.
- October 2016 Club finished – boy asks when is it going to start again?

Interviewee 9.

- December 2015 child joins club.
- Jan 2016 child begins to miss sessions.
- Feb 2016 child not picked up from club.
- May 2016 child taken into care. Regular attendance at club.

Interviewee 10.

- Sept 2016 - the girl is 'Lacking self-confidence. Hindered by mum.'
- Dec 2016 the girl's mother writes note to say she does not want child participating in the school mile. 'Child upset and does star jumps for the entire duration of the mile.'
- Jan-March 2017 invited to Change4Life club and mum says Yes.
- Improvement in the girl's attitude in class.
- Development in self-belief and more effort in improving own work.
- Summer term 2017 child chooses to participate in two more clubs: cricket and athletics.

Interviewee 11.

- May 2015 the girl starts attending school - her attendance rate at her previous school is 73%.
- May 2016 new sports leader raises profile of cross country running in school.
- The girl is picked to represent the school in the town sports competition and wins the gold medal in running.
- September 2016 the girl joins the school cross country club.
- December 2016 qualifies for County finals, but Mum doesn't take her!
- The school is worried as to how the girl will progress in her running without the support of the school.
- March 2017 the girl's school attendance is 96%.

Interviewee 12.

- The girl is invited to attend Double Trouble – a Baking Club which teaches Maths.

- Term I Week 4 – excitement and keen to begin. Phoned mum to get permission as reply slip not returned.
- Often not collected at the end of sessions so she would go to Sunset Club and be picked up about 5.30pm.
- The girl also attended Athletics, Cheerleading, Bookworms, Capture the Flag during this time.

Interviewee 14.

- Nov 2016 Switch off Fortnight at school – the girl goes around encouraging teachers and children to turn off lights.
- March 2017 building sculpture over a few weeks for PolliNation Art Competition.
- Eastbourne in Bloom competition – the group produce plan/structure garden.
- July 2017 school assembly on pollinating insects given by whole club group.

Interviewee 15.

- The boy is reluctant to speak (speech impediment).
- Confident enough to speak but often seeking approval.
- The boy is more confident engaging in games.
- More comfort in expressing his ideas in front of the group.
- Confidence building activities.
- The boy's hyperactivity has calmed down.
- The boy is more focussed on progressing as a speaker.
- First debate. HIGH POINT. The boy delivers a perfect speech. The boy is praised.  
The boy dances around and smiles all afternoon.
- The boy encourages and helps other children.
- The boy has his hand in the air for everything.
- No bad behaviour at all.
- The second debate is lost. The boy cries after his speech.
- A great chat afterwards rebuilds the boy's confidence.
- The boy returns confident and ready to continue learning.

Interviewee 17.

- Nov 2014 start of programme.
- Dec 2014 the boy leads a group activity.

- Jan 2015 first debating competition.
- March 2015 second competition.
- May 2015 elected president of Debate Society. J
- July 2015 the boy runs a debate in his school assembly.

Interviewee 18.

- First session the girl is very shy and refuses to participate.
- Third session the girl is still not very willing to participate but after some encouragement she does. The girl is mentioned at the end of the session to acknowledge her participation
- The girl is more enthusiastic.
- First debate competition the girl is chosen to be in the team which makes her very excited.
- The team loses both debates but she was not put down by it and wants to get better.
- Preparation for the second debate competition – she is really keen and wants to show that she has improved.
- The team win both debates and are recognised as among the most improved schools. The girl is recognised as one of the most improved debaters from London.
- The girl thanks the practitioner for being their mentor and says that she definitely wants to keep debating.
- The team loses the next debate (by the team who eventually won the competition). The girl is the least upset of all the group.

Interviewee 19.

- The girl is selected to the club in week three and shows promise.
- The girl is excluded from next couple of sessions due to school related issues.
- In week six she re-joins group.
- The girl performs well.
- First competition, the group loses first debate but child is instrumental to the team winning the second debate.
- The girl is given role as team captain.

Interviewee 20.

- Nov 2015 the girl begins.

- December 2015 first debate practice – the girl doesn't talk or contribute.
- Feb 2016 massive improvements in the girl's self-confidence.
- The girl actively contributes in the first debate competition.
- March 2016 the group lose the debate competition. The team is down but she is more determined.
- April 2016 the group win the debate and the girl hugs the practitioner and the whole team.
- Nov 2016 the girl re-joins the debating club and gets her friends to come so she can show off her skills.
- The girl has been keen and participating ever since.

## 5.5 Practitioner Definitions of Resilience

Only one of the practitioners (Interview 6) said they were unfamiliar with the term *resilience*.

Without being prompted, two practitioners (Interview 1 and 2, which were both from the same school) talked of resilience being “huge” and “massive” in their school.

Others, equally without being prompted, declared that “resilience” was a topic discussed in their school (Interview 3,4,10,11).

Nine respondents used the phrase ‘not giving up’ within their definitions of resilience. Other phrases included: ‘being able to push through’, ‘being able to respond’, ‘persevering’, ‘to overcome obstacles’, ‘put more effort into it’, ‘getting back up again’, ‘the ability to bounce back’, ‘being able to keep going’, ‘carry on, keep going’, ‘sort of stand up and ride things’, and ‘learning to dance in the rain’.

Another theme for resilience came from learning from one's mistakes: ‘resilience is making a mistake, finding a strategy to get around it and improving it, without just giving up’ (Interview 12). Two of the respondents spoke of resilience entailing responding positively to ‘feedback’ after losing a debating competition.

All twenty definitions referred to resilience as something that resided within the individual, a gritty determination to plough on (almost regardless). Two respondents gave a purpose to ‘not giving up’ in relation to ‘goals’ to achieve. Two respondents briefly mentioned the attributes of resilience coming from beyond the individual in ‘help from others’ and ‘having the support around you to overcome barriers personally’.



## **5.6 Home Influences**

Six practitioners referred briefly to barriers or obstacles from the child's home life to ECA participation. Interviewee 2 stated that what went on at home at night greatly affected the child's performance the next day. Interviewee 11 referred to a 'chaotic home life' that was reflected in the child's 80% school attendance. Interviewee 10 talked of the difficulty of getting the child's mother to sign the permission slip for her daughter to attend the ECA. Interviewee 4 said that the child's home life had not helped in the child's overall attachment to school.

Two interviews mentioned parental support for the child participating in ECA (Interviewees 6 & 8) and interviewee 5 spoke of the child, in view of his achievement and enjoyment in Forestry School, persuading his family to visit a Forestry School in the summer holidays.

The six Persuade mentors (Interviewees 15- 20) did not comment on their child's home life, no doubt through lack of knowledge.

## **5.7 The Child's Resilience**

Eighteen practitioners judged their child to be more resilient after six months of ECA. Most practitioners were emphatic in their judgement. For example:

'Yeah, absolutely. Completely' (Interview 5).

'...just a huge, huge yes, most definitely' (Interview 13).

'Yes. Yeah. [Laughs] That sounds like the most confident I've been when I've answered...' (Interview 20).

'Yeah. One hundred per cent. One hundred per cent. Yeah, like, just, there's no other answer other than 'yes'!' (Interview 15).

Confidence was the word most commonly used to describe the child's increased resilience.

'I definitely think their confidence has grown because of it.' (Interview 8)

Increased levels of being *confident* or *self-confidence* was equated with improved resilience in eight interviews (1,3,5,7,8,9,12, & 13). For example:

'The feedback from staff is always the same that they have seen a big difference in the child's confidence' (Interview 7).

Increased levels of confidence could explain why six of the children chose to join further ECAs (Interviews 1, 2, 5, 10, 12, 13).

Increased levels of perseverance (Interviews 2, 6, 16, 17, 18, 19) were also associated with greater confidence:

'...they had to persevere, which you know has led to some sort of resilience as well... And her and the confidence I see in her now yeah definitely yeah' (Interview 18).

The recurrent themes played around notions of 'having a go' (Interview 2), 'much more willing to have a go at things' (Interview 6), accepting set-backs (Interviews 16 &17) and persevering for better results, often through responding to feedback (Interviews 15 &18):

'Yeah definitely... losing the first debate and then being the one to really bring it back in the second when they won and then being able to take on the responsibility of being Team Captain...' (Interview 19).

Three practitioners spoke about a change of attitude, comportment, and applying new strategies:

'So before where she went "oh I just don't know it" and just not try, now she'd be like, she'll make connections back to what she's been taught before and be able to know the

strategy to be able to apply it in class. I think it's about the strategies to become resilient' (Interview 12).

'... she, in the classroom, had completely changed her attitude and her outlook to her work' (Interview 11).

'Now the hard data would be things like attendance, her academic attainment and so forth, but just the way she conducts herself around the school, her pride in herself, her appearance, all of that I would say stems from this sort of extra-curricular activity success that she's had' (Interview 11).

'learning how to deal with failure I think is really important to a child's development and being resilient' (Interview 17).

Neither '*mindset*' nor '*growth mindset*' or '*character*' were explicitly mentioned by any of the practitioners. What was implied by these answers is a transformation in the child's attitude.

## **5.8 Improved Academic Performance**

Resilience was also equated with performing better in the classroom. Six practitioners referred to improving academic performance for the child since participating in the ECA (Interview 2, 6, 11, 12, 13, & 17). Interviewee 17 talked about the child contributing more in class. Similarly, interview 2 and 11 claimed:

'Academically, I know that he has produced more in class, he is doing better, so yes, it did have a big impact' (Interview 2).

'Her academic achievement is rising, so she's working at national standard for her year group and I think in some areas she's potentially moving into sort of greater depth in some aspects of her learning' (Interview 11).

Positive academic consequences were attributed to improved confidence in two cases:

‘Much more confident, much more willing to have a go at things...he’s much more vocal within the class and within the school’ (Interview 6).

‘Academically, her confidence has most definitely improved... being able to talk about things more easily, applying what she’s been teaching the children, the Year Three children, into her own learning’ (Interview 12).

Another practitioner (Interview 13) mentioned a number of outcomes including gaining confidence to join in class discussions, increasing her reading age from 6 years 11 months to 10 years 11 months, in one year.

## 5.9 The Resilience Framework

Three of the practitioners were familiar with the Framework (Interviews 2, 3, & 13).

Resilience Framework (Children & Young People) Oct 2012 – adapted from Hart & Blincow 2007 <a href="http://www.boingboing.org.uk">www.boingboing.org.uk</a>					
	BASICS	BELONGING	LEARNING	COPING	CORE SELF
SPECIFIC APPROACHES	Good enough housing	Find somewhere for the child/YP to belong	Make school/college life work as well as possible	Understanding boundaries and keeping within them	Instil a sense of hope
	Enough money to live	Help child/YP understand their place in the world		Engage mentors for children/YP	
		Tap into good influences	Solving problems		Support the child/YP to understand other people’s feelings
	Being safe	Keep relationships going	Map out career or life plan		
	Access & transport	The more healthy relationships the better		Help the child/YP to organise her/himself	Fostering their interests
		Take what you can from relationships where there is some hope	Calming down & self-soothing		Help the child/YP take responsibility for her/himself
	Healthy diet	Get together people the child/YP can count on	Highlight achievements	Remember tomorrow is another day	Foster their talents
	Exercise and fresh air	Responsibilities & obligations			
		Focus on good times and places	Have a laugh	There are tried and tested treatments for specific problems, use them	
	Enough sleep	Make sense of where child/YP has come from			
Play & leisure	Predict a good experience of someone or something new				
Being free from prejudice & discrimination	Make friends and mix with other children/YPs				
<b>NOBLE TRUTHS</b>					
<b>ACCEPTING</b>		<b>CONSERVING</b>		<b>ENLISTING</b>	
<b>COMMITMENT</b>					

Figure 3. The Resilience Framework.

Each practitioner was invited to place a tick inside any box or Specific Approaches they perceived had contributed to their account of ECA engagement. I also asked them to place a cross in any box they believed had been a hindrance to their account.

The practitioners seemed comfortable with the Specific Approaches highlighted in the Resilience Framework and the practitioners were observed placing ticks within these moves or approaches when often they had been unable to comprehensibly verbalise these processes earlier in the interview. It appeared that the Resilience Framework gave them an analytical tool in which to express their response to sustaining ECA.

Twenty-one ticks were placed in BASICS, 106 ticks in BELONGING, 66 in LEARNING, 80 in COPING, and 59 in CORE SELF.

The most popular approaches were Highlight achievements (19 ticks), Make friends and mix with other children/YPs (17 ticks), Develop life skills (16 ticks), Have a laugh (16 ticks), Foster their talents (16 ticks), Foster their interests (15 ticks), Keep relationships going (13 ticks), and Find somewhere for the child/YP to belong (13 ticks).

The practitioners were asked if they thought there was a category missing from the Framework. No one identified a missing category.

Eighteen crosses were identified as hindrances in the BASICS column with *Access & Transport* receiving the most (5 crosses), followed by *Enough sleep* (4 crosses), *Being free from prejudice & discrimination* (4 crosses), *Being safe* (2 crosses), *Enough money* (2 crosses), and *Good enough housing* (1 cross).

The Belonging column received 3 crosses, Keep relationships going (1 cross), Make sense of where child/YP has come from (1 cross), and Make friends and mix with other children/YPs (1 cross).

Returning to the theme of adversity and hindrances one practitioner (Interview 2) highlighted influences beyond school:

‘...what goes on at home the night and morning before school impacts massively on school performance.’

## **5.10 Practitioners’ One-Line Summative Phrase**

The practitioners were then invited to write a phrase to sum up their account. Fourteen of the practitioners contributed to this. Whilst the practitioners equated the outcome of their

account with increased levels of the child's self-confidence and a transformed attitude, nine of the fourteen summing up phrases pointed towards the process and the role of practitioners rather than the outcome.

'Acceptance, love, understanding, confidence, celebrating success.' (Interview 5)

'Opportunity to showcase what you have learnt.' (Interview 19)

'Create an environment where the children feel safe.' (Interview 18)

'Goals to work towards – give them something to achieve.' (Interview 15)

'Highlight achievements.' (Interview 20)

'Do not give up on the children. Enthusiasm. Competition as motivation.' (Interview 16)

'Have a laugh – They are children. Adult enthusiasm.' (Interview 1)

'Relationships key.' (Interview 4)

'The child's sense of belonging in the community.' (Interview 12)

Three of the phrases pointed to the child's internal response.

'Understanding your identity' (Interview 17)

'Flexibility of thought – adapting and coping with change, transitions' (Interview 8)

'Self-belief' (Interview 10)

Two phrases referred to contextual conditions, broader and/or beyond the school perimeter, which influenced the child's performance.

'Mental health can be a barrier in terms of parental engagement and support.' (Interview 11)

'What goes on the night before and morning affects this dramatically' (Interview 2)

**Table 1** illustrates the key themes and outcomes of triggering and sustaining ECA engagement from the twenty interviews.

Triggering ECA engagement	Sustaining ECA engagement	Outcomes
Invitation/selection of the disadvantaged child  Incorporating ECA into the school timetable (8.45am -3.15pm)	Non-classroom experience (including fun)  Competition  Representing the school  Feedback and praise from practitioner  Feedback and praise from other children  Ownership and responsibility	Improved confidence  Better levels of perseverance  Improved academic performance  Better school attendance

**Table 1.** Themes and outcomes of triggering and sustaining ECA engagement

### 5.11 Frustrations

The practitioners were asked if they could identify anything that hindered or frustrated them in their work. Interviewee 1 was frustrated by a shrinkage of ‘funding’ for the arts:

‘because the powers that be can’t specifically link the arts with academic progress but those of us in the arts know that we support the academic... learning... in a big way’ (Interview 3).

Interviewee 2 was frustrated by a decrease in money to employ a teaching assistant in P.E. This interviewee was frustrated because they saw the benefit that children get from participating in ECA. Interviewee 3 was frustrated because fewer ECAs were offered to the children. Interviewee 2 also pointed to staff fatigue not helping, saying that the last thing you want to do at the end of the school day is to stay on another hour and run a club. Additionally, interviewee 2 commented that there was a question of being skilled enough to run an after-school club.

Interviewee 9 lamented on not having another adult to help her run the club despite there being a high interest level:

‘and I ended up, rather than turning the children away, I ended up taking on more children than I’d originally planned because I didn’t want to turn them away, but we couldn’t afford to have another member of staff stay later’ (Interview 9).

Interview 9 also felt frustrated with:

‘all the paperwork, all the policy-following, all this ticking boxes on forms that we have to do for higher powers, that stops up being the teachers that we joined the profession to be’ (Interview 9).

A Persuade mentor (Interviewee 20) regretted just having one hour a week with her group, especially since the first fifteen minutes is typically spent trying to get them back to where they were the week before.

Another Persuade mentor (Interviewee 17) commented on the children being ‘incredibly bright and they have loads of potential but I can see education is failing them’.

## **5.12 The Practitioners**

The practitioners were asked about the origins and importance of ECA in their lives. I was interested to discover whether the practitioners had a hobby. If they had a hobby, I wanted to find out how important this hobby was and how their hobby began. I wanted to establish to what extent the practitioners had reflected upon their own childhood ECA memories to guide professional practice. Although these findings are not directly related to the research questions of how triggering and sustaining ECA takes place for a disadvantaged child in middle childhood, the data here points heavily towards the importance of adults in fashioning ECA in childhood and how this ECA may become a lifetime interest.

### **5.12.1 Practitioner Hobbies**

Eighteen of the twenty practitioners said they had a hobby outside of work. Of the two practitioners who professed to not having a hobby, one said they were now too busy taking her own children to clubs and activities; something she had encouraged as a mother



(Interviewee 10); the other practitioner counted her work as a debating mentor as her hobby (Interviewee 16).

The importance of hobbies for the practitioners ranged from ‘really important’ (Interviewee 14) to ‘hobbies feel like part of you’ (Interviewee 19) and ‘absolutely massive...it’s how I view the world’ (Interviewee 1).

One practitioner saw their hobby as their ‘identity’ (Interviewee 17), which was their way of interacting with the world. Two spoke of hobbies keeping them ‘sane’ (Interviewee 6 & 13). Others saw the benefit of hobbies as ‘a release’ from the other pressures in life (Interviewee 2); ‘downtime from work... for our sort of mental health’ (Interviewee 11).

### **5.12.2 Triggering a lifetime hobby. Practitioners’ memories**

Of the eighteen practitioners who said they practiced a hobby, sixteen pointed to childhood as the commencement to their life-long hobby. Of these, six indicated a family member (predominantly parents) who had introduced them to their hobby, and ten identified a teacher at Primary school (not Secondary school) as the trigger to their hobby. Three of these respondents spoke of both family and school influences and the importance of opportunities and the access to facilities.

School and a relationship with a teacher was a recurring theme:

‘I remember having a particular outstanding teacher that year.’ (Interview 14)

Remembering good teachers and the subjects they taught:

‘I had a really good music teacher at school.’ (Interview 15)

Another recurring theme was relationships with a teacher. These relationships with teachers could encourage interest:

‘my relationship with my teacher...harboured, well, encouraged my interest in, in art generally.’ (Interview 3)

‘...and you certainly remember the good teachers and take on board their traits and, you know, the things that inspired you and made you respect them and, and enabled you to build a rapport with them.’ (Interview 4)

Five respondents spoke of certain teachers being enthusiastic and energetic, for example: ‘a big Welsh teacher who was very enthusiastic, spurred you on, basically, thinking back.’ (Interview 8). They remembered these ‘good’ teachers for being interested in them as learners and transforming their ways of approaching subjects ‘whether you’re a visual, auditory or a kinaesthetic learner’ (Interview 14).

A potent combination were enthusiastic parents ‘my mum and dad were very keen on us pursuing various leisure activities’ (Interview 10) and an inspirational teacher to further foster ECA.

Of the two practitioners with hobbies who did not identify a family member or primary school, one said she had been introduced to her hobby by her husband (Interview 6) and the other believed that she had been born to perform her hobby (Interview 5).

### **5.12.3 Practitioners’ childhood memories and professional practice**

Establishing to what extent practitioners had reflected upon these childhood ECA memories to integrate into their own professional practice with children, provoked tentative responses. Often, practitioners did not directly answer the question. This provided the impression that, for the most part, the practitioners had not fully considered or linked what had worked for them in childhood and their own professional action. Usually the practitioners continued to speak of their school experiences rather than explaining how, or to what extent, these experiences had influenced their teaching practice. Two practitioners spoke about not feeling supported at school and the sense of struggling:

‘I didn’t feel like I was supported through learning. I don’t think I was taught to suit my personality.’ (Interview 9)

‘I’ve always been really interested in working with children who struggle in certain areas because I think with the right support and the right encouragement everyone can

succeed' (Interview 5). This had motivated the practitioner to help children who struggled in classroom activities to find other avenues to success.

Two practitioners spoke of an activity providing an opportunity for success and a member of staff in the school believing in them:

'I remember the feeling that someone believed in me...tennis gave me that break and chance to show the school that I was capable, I just needed someone to notice' (Interview 13).

'I learnt over the years of being a mentor that that's actually the most key thing, engaging children is respecting them and just like when they find something exciting, run with it and because my teachers did that with music' (Interview 15).

One practitioner remembered the sense of 'belonging to a club ...and I can remember that happening for me. So I very much use that model, really, that I had as a child.' (Interview 11)

Another practitioner spoke of having benefitted from the opportunity to participate in school and thereby wanting to offer the same opportunity and pathways to success that they had experienced:

'As I was successful in all the clubs I took part in, I wanted to pass this onto the next generation... This is the reason I started a girls' football team up' (Interview 7).

One practitioner said she used 'achievable and clear goals' (Interview 15) in her debating club as these had worked for her as a child.

### **5.13 Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented the key themes in relation to my research aim of explaining how ECA engagement is triggered and sustained in middle childhood for a disadvantaged child who had previously never participated.

The dominant triggering themes (1) invitation/selection of the child into the ECA, with sixteen of the twenty accounts pointing to this process and (2) changing the timetable. Whilst the selection criteria might point to all or most accounts being a practitioner introducing a child to the ECA, we cannot dismiss the possibility of several other processes, such as invitation from peers, the coming of age, the formation of a new club, a school assembly, the child's own volition, etc.

The sustaining themes are: (1) non-classroom experiences, (2) competition, (3) representing the school, (4) feedback, praise (from the practitioner), achievement, (5) feedback and praise from other children, (6) ownership and responsibility.

The fifteen timelines provided by the practitioners indicate a virtuous/positive sequence of events that accentuate the key themes of triggering and sustaining ECA engagement revealed by the interviews. These accounts and timelines provide a valuable sequential insight into building a resilient route through ECA to counter the cumulative adversarial effects of poverty and disadvantage.

Eighteen practitioners perceived the child to be more resilient after at least six months of ECA. Improved resilience was mostly equated with confidence (Interviews 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, & 13) and perseverance (Interviews 2,6,15, 16,17, 18, &19). This increased confidence may partially explain how six of the children subsequently joined other ECAs through their own volition (Interviews 1,2,5,10,12, &13). Three practitioners identified a change in attitude to learning in their child (Interviews 11, 12, & 17).

Another resilient consequence of sustained ECA engagement was improved academic performance (Interviews 2, 6, 11, 12, 13, & 17) and school attendance (Interviews 10 & 11). This may point to improved confidence and perseverance being transferable from the domain of ECA to the classroom.

The significance of school experiences in promoting interest in activities was highlighted by the practitioners' accounts of how their life-long hobby began. Ten practitioners pointed to primary school, and to a particular teacher, as the trigger for their life-long hobby. This would possibly indicate the significance of interest formation in middle childhood to lifetime trajectories.

In the following Discussion (**Chapter 6**), I present the abduction stage of critical realism. In this abduction stage I offer theories to explain the events highlighted in the findings chapter in more depth by identifying the processes that drive these events (Danermark et al., 2002). Bygstad and Munkfield (2011, p.5) define this stage as 'the theoretical re-description' of events.

The retroduction stage to CR explanation will be considered in chapter eight:  
Implications, which will be concerned with my second research aim:

- To gain insight into what is needed for extra-curricular activities to be a resilience building mechanism.

## **Chapter 6. Discussion. Triggering and Sustaining ECA Engagement**

This chapter is concerned with applying the abduction stage of critical realism explanation. It addresses the first research aim:

- To explain how extra-curricular engagement is triggered and sustained for disadvantaged children in middle childhood.

Critical realism uses abduction in an attempt to gain knowledge ‘in terms of theories’, which may explain events (Danermark et al., 2002, p. 10). This requires the researcher to offer a theoretical explanation for events that hold the greatest explanatory power. According to Olsen and Morgan (2004, p. 25), this means asking ‘how events have happened in the way they did.’ This also requires the researcher to delve beneath the surface of descriptions ‘empirical reality’ as represented by the practitioner interview accounts in search of deeper, often invisible processes, ‘the real level of reality’ that influence or directly cause the observable actions (Olsen & Morgan, 2004, p.25).

Given the nature of this thesis in collating and investigating accounts of successful ECA engagement, we can liken the processes that influenced positive outcomes (indicated by abduction in this chapter) to Bronfenbrenner’s proximal processes. Bronfenbrenner saw proximal processes as almost always acting in a positive way on developmental outcomes the ‘engines of development’ (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p. 118), either by promoting outcomes of competence or by weakening dysfunctional outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006). Proximal processes exist outside the child but drive the child’s response. This abduction chapter, in searching for environmental processes, which favour positive internal outcomes for the child, advances a socio-ecological understanding of ECA engagement and the route to resilience.

### **6.1 Triggering ECA Engagement**

The first process in triggering a child’s ECA engagement is rather obvious. It is the availability of the ECA. However, the findings highlight that the availability of ECA by itself is not enough. Many children do not habitually choose to participate. This supports earlier findings of The Sutton Trust (2014) that amongst 45 schools that reported provision of

debating clubs only 2% of pupils reported participating. The poorest pupils were found to be least likely to take up activities.

However, my findings indicate that children facing adversity beyond indices of poverty (FSM) also do not take up activities. Three of the accounts highlighted children facing physical adversity, which may well indicate why these children had not chosen to participate under their own volition. Whether poverty or physiological challenges the findings illuminate the significant role of practitioners in engaging the child to begin an ECA. Sixteen of the 20 interviews accounted for child being selected or invited to join a school club, rather than the child choosing themselves. This in itself is not extraordinary, given that this research sought accounts from practitioners who had successfully triggered and sustained ECA engagement for a disadvantaged child in Key Stage 2. However, this finding does provide insight into the influential role of adults in triggering ECA participation. Given previous research that indicates that a child who does not participate in ECA at primary school will most probably never participate at secondary school (Aumetre & Poulin, 2016; Fletcher et al., 2003), we can postulate a strong possibility that these 16 children, without the intervention of the school/practitioner, might never otherwise have engaged in ECA. We can also supplement this possibility with evidence from the Sutton Trust (2014, 2017) that FSM children participate less in ECA and that ECA participation declines for all pupils after middle childhood (Wang & Eccles, 2012). Children who participate in activities during middle childhood are more likely to continue to do so during adolescence (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2014; Simpkins et al., 2006). The findings above all indicate that FSM children facing adversity whether through poverty, or special educational needs may well require the care of an adult to supervise their participation in ECA.

This does not signify that these 16 children who were selected/invited did not want to participate. Challenges such as autism, speech and hearing, which accounted for three accounts of adversity, may well prevent a child from choosing to participate. It is a strong indication that interest and motivation may be underdeveloped in middle childhood and this may be particularly the case for children from backgrounds where ECA is not encouraged or expected due to lack of emphasis in the immediate culture (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2014; Savage, 2015; Sjödin, & Roman, 2018). It may be that children require experiences to awaken or form interest. Only one of the sixteen children invited/selected was considered reluctant to participate (Interview 18). The absence of any other accounts of an initial reluctance to participate after an invitation/selection from an adult perhaps emphasises the importance of middle childhood in relation to triggering ECA engagement. Research shows

that ECA activity drops in adolescence (Aumtere & Poulin, 2016; Wang & Eccles, 2012; Zimmermann-Sloutskis et al., 2010) and we may postulate that the potency of adult selection/invitation to participate may also be less successful in adolescence.

The role of adults in shaping participation and possible lifetime interest is supported by previous research. Parental/family influence is the principal driver of childhood ECA participation (Anderson et al., 2003; Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2014; Wheeler, 2012; Wheeler & Green, 2014). Reay (1998) found that middle-class mothers of children in primary school to be engaged in extensive, systematic programmes of generating cultural capital. Dance drama and music lessons were ‘what people like us do’ (Reay, 1998). Birchwood et al. (2003) found that family cultures were the chief factor underpinning the propensity of individuals to play sport.

My findings indicate that, in the absence of these family values, the next line of influence upon ECA engagement is driven by adults within school. Practitioners may function directly as promotive and protective factors in the lives of high-risk children, while also nurturing the learning skills and resilience of each child. Practitioners may invite a child to participate in an ECA and their relationship with that child is important in the construct of the child’s route towards resilience, defined by performing better than before. What Masten (2001) termed ‘ordinary magic’ and Aranda and Hart (2015) called ‘resilient moves’ are exemplified on the Resilience Framework; these are simple caring practices that schools and practitioners can execute to bolster a connectedness and well-being for the child to their school. They may also be considered protective processes against persistent adversity that exist in other areas of a child’s ecology. Practitioners, therefore, have the potential to be pivotal in driving proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006) within a child’s ecology, that is, powerful protective school relationships (Galassi, Griffin & Akos, 2008; Masten, 2006). We can consider adults in schools as gatekeepers to many resources that nurture well-being (Ungar et al., 2007).

We can, therefore, consider that adult invitation or selection at school is a proximal process for triggering ECA engagement in middle childhood for disadvantaged children. This has implications for engagement theory, which will be considered in this chapter.

However, we must also consider the triggering processes of the four other practitioner accounts where the child was not invited/selected. In interview 1, the practitioner considered that the child decided to join the ECA after hearing about an art competition organised by the local council. This required the council to devise this competition, the school to enter the competition and the child to be informed. In interview 6, the boy was determined to learn



how to ride a bicycle and joined the after-school bike club. His desire to ride, the practitioner explained, came from him seeing other boys in his neighbourhood and school riding bikes; he wanted to do be able to do the same. It is interesting to note that, subsequently, the boy was selected by the school to join another club (a bicycle maintenance club) as another process in boosting his confidence. In interview 7, a girl joined the girl's football club because she enjoyed football. The practitioner was unable to cite where the girl's interest in football originated. In interview 14, a girl joined the gardening club because her brother, who had previously joined the club, told her she would enjoy it. In this case we can say it is sibling influence. In three of these four stories, where the child joined the ECA through their own volition, we can still see someone in the child's ecology influencing their choice to engage.

To further signal the importance of adults in the proximal process of triggering ECA engagement, ten practitioners (50%) identified a teacher at Primary school (not Secondary school) as the trigger to their life-long hobby. School, and a relationship with a particular teacher, was a recurring theme in the practitioner memories. This would indicate that where home encouragement for ECA does not exist, the presence of a significant, enthusiastic adult in Primary school is a potent pre-requisite to trigger a child's engagement in ECA.

Middle childhood years introduces children to new social roles beyond home in which they earn social status by their competence and performance. Erikson (1963) believed that children who do not master the skills required in these new settings are likely to develop a 'sense of inferiority'. Erikson's 'sense of inferiority' resonates with Seligman's later notion of "learned helplessness" (Abramson & Seligman, 1978; Seligman, 1975; Seligman, Maier & Geer 1979) whereby through past histories of repeated cycles of failure in other fields, such as in the classroom, a child may develop an expectancy to perform poorly. Skinner also recognised that a sense of learned helplessness did contribute to performance, which could have 'multiple external causes ... such as powerful others, luck, and unknown causes' (Skinner, 1990 p.1889). Researchers have confirmed Erikson's notion that feelings of competence and personal esteem are of central importance for a child's well-being in middle childhood (Eccles et al., 1998; Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2014; Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, Guhn et al., 2014). This thesis points to 'powerful others' being adults in school who can provide access to routes to success.

Only two practitioners alluded to themselves having had a disadvantaged childhood. In both cases, an adult at school was identified as triggering their ECA engagement. In interview 13, engagement in tennis was triggered in the practitioner by a visiting tennis coach to her lower school who identified 'that I had some hand/eye coordination.' In interview 17

‘my reception teacher recommended that to my parents... I go to a drama school... I was lucky that the drama school offered fee waivers for people who didn’t actually have loads of money.’

Eight stories (Interviews 5, 11, & 15–20) featured schools that reduced obstacles to engagement, with the ECA taking place during the official school day of 8.45am–3.15pm. This was to avoid problems accessing an after-school club (post 3.15pm) when most ECAs took place. Accessibility to after-school clubs is perhaps especially important for children in this research who had never previously joined a school club.

The potency of practitioners in schools introducing activities to pupils may be particularly significant in middle childhood. Erikson (1963) stressed the importance of middle childhood as a time when children move from the overarching dominance of home into wider social contexts of the school and neighbourhood, which increasingly influence their development. Reflecting upon the ecology of middle childhood, Oberle et al. (2014) examined the role of supportive adults to emotional well-being in 9-year-olds and suggest that practitioner support in the school culminates at the age of nine. This, I suggest, would indicate that middle childhood is an optimal time of supportive adults to invite a child to participate in an ECA.

### **6.1.2 Into the Field**

As Braun and Clarke (2012) advocate that themes tell a story from the data, so I intend the stage of abduction, the theoretical explanation of the themes, to equally contribute to a coherent story to explain the accounts of successful ECA engagement. The two triggering themes of *Invitation/Selection* and *Changing the Timetable* imply notions of access, permission and gatekeepers. There is a sense of rights of way, *rites de passage* and being in the place.

Through my abduction or ‘theoretical re-description’ of events (Bygstad and Munkfield, 2011, p.5) I have identified Bourdieu’s notion of *field* (Bourdieu, 1990, 2005) as providing a theoretical explanation for events that hold the greatest explanatory power. For a child to participate in ECA, the availability of the ECA is required. The concept of field has an apt name. In 2014, in an article entitled, ‘Is it game over for school playing fields?’, The Telegraph reported that between 1979 and 1997 some 10,000 playing fields had been sold off and for UK schoolchildren wanting to participate in sporting activities the prospects have never been worse. Whilst the rate of selling off school playing fields in the UK for

commercial investment has slowed since the end of the last century, according to the GMG union (2019) more than 200 playing fields have been sold off since 2010. Francis Duku, GMB Organiser, said, 'The Government has cut education funding to such an extent schools are being forced to flog their playing fields to make ends meet.'

I consider that Bourdieu's notion of field provides the best theoretical insight into the triggering of ECA engagement in these twenty accounts and the practitioner opening the gate into this field. It is this access that permits the forward continuation of the ECA route towards resilient outcomes, that is, for a disadvantaged child to perform better than before. Whilst Bourdieu's concept of field did not feature in my literature review, I became increasingly aware of the theoretical insight that field offered into the data that emerged from the interviews. Bourdieu saw each field as a game. This is useful when considering ECA. Bourdieu saw life divided into different fields of activity or games. Each field has its own sets of positions and practices. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) described these roles/positions as a 'relational configuration endowed with a specific gravity which it imposes on all the objects and agents which enter it' (p. 17). In this context, field refers to both the primary school field in which these stories are situated and the ECA field into which the child has been selected/invited. These two fields are interrelated but distinct.

The child in their first ever ECA may be seen as entering a new arena of activity or field of practice. In this new ECA, the newly invited child has little concept of what is required or expected. They have limited experience on which to judge their perceptions, competencies and to how to perform. Past school experiences may well influence their initial expectancies and judgements.

Arenas of action, or fields, are characterised by social organisation and movement. Social organisation and movement refers to the practical ways in which tasks of everyday life are accomplished and includes how genres of talk ways of speaking are expected and normalised, how tools are applied, how and with whom tasks are expected to be accomplished, and how human relatedness emerges as tasks are carried out and accomplished (Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). The significance of the social organisation of field activities is that it structures entitlements and opportunities for individuals and groups to use their skills, strategies and resources.

Inevitably, each field or game requires the rules of the game to be learned by the child. Such arrangements influence how a task is accomplished, how and when to pose questions, and who has the authority to evaluate solutions or offer strategies. Such arrangements for knowledge production of habitus are built historically and influence the

potential for movement within the field. In these ECA fields, the child can be thought of adopting a kind received knowledge of how to perform. Entering a new field changes individuals' responses, ideas and behaviours. Davey (2009) argues that it is through immersion into a new field that we see most clearly see the formation of habitus.

I am introducing habitus here because field and habitus are intertwined. However, it is important to stress that habitus is always in response to the field. The provision of the field dictates the child's response to being in the field. Habitus is explained in greater depth later in this chapter and is identified by abduction as a process of the sustaining phase of ECA engagement. For the triggering phase, what is crucial is that the school provides the ECA field and the child is selected into the ECA field. It is this submersion into the field that forms the subsequent habitus (Wacquant, 2011). Submersion into an ECA field provides the possibility of transforming a child's ideas and behaviours. What follows this entry into the new ECA field is crucial to shaping these new ideas and behaviours and the child's length of ECA engagement. Middle childhood may be the most receptive developmental stage for the occurrence of a triggering stage of an adult inviting a child to participate. Beyond middle childhood, the influence of an adult to trigger ECA for an adolescent may diminish significantly. It is the existence of the ECA field and the child's entry into this field that permits a child's potential habitus adjustment to this field.

The process of a child being selected/invited to take part in a school activity for the first time poses several questions. Firstly, to what extent does the child want to participate or feel obliged to participate? If they want to participate, this then raises the question as to why the child had not previously participated. If the child now feels compelled having been invited/selected by a member of staff, this then raises questions as to the interest levels (or lack of) of this child towards the activity. What is clear is that in none of the stories did the child initially refuse and in only one interview (Interview 20) was the child described as acting, in the first six months, as though they didn't want to be there. It is important to remember that all the stories feature a disadvantaged child in middle childhood participating in an ECA for the first time in primary school. Where a child was invited or selected to participate in an activity, we can liken the school practitioner as a gatekeeper to the resource. The child may well have been aware of the gate and of peers who had passed through but required an adult in the school to unfasten the lock and permit entry into the field. Where other children had passed these children remained on the other side of the fence.

Secondly, beyond provision of the ECA, the child needs to participate. This was achieved by schools targeting children who they felt would benefit from taking part in the

club. We should remember that children who do not participate in ECA in primary school tend not to participate throughout their entire education (Aumetre & Poulin, 2016; Fletcher et al. 2003). Therefore, as research suggests, we can assume the strong possibility that these sixteen children would have tended to not have engaged in any ECA in primary school or secondary school without adult intervention of inviting/selecting them into the field of ECA.

Playing fields are restricted and the activities played in these fields are reserved for those with access to these fields. Many sports are increasingly dominated by the privileged few. According to Tozer (2013), between 2000 to 2016, the proportion of the British Olympic teams educated at private schools almost doubled, rising from 13.1% to 23.4%. One third of British Olympic medals since 2000 have been won by competitors from private schools. A child who is educated in a private school has five times more chance of winning an Olympic medal than one who does not. In non-Olympic sports, with a few exceptions, such as football and rugby league and boxing, the trend is similar. Whilst less than ten per cent of the country are privately educated, a third of English sports internationals were privately educated and according to Tozer (2013) this number is rising. At the same time, many of the sports receiving more funding than ever are dominated by privately educated competitors. For example, rowing and equestrian receive a combined £50 m of UK Sport's overall budget of £275m (UK Sport, 2019). Eton College, one of Britain's most expensive private schools, has produced a medal winner at every Olympic Games since 1992 in either rowing or equestrian. Similarly, in a report entitled 'Level playing field?', Ofsted (2014) reported that private-school pupils still have a head-start in sports and found that since 2000, half of the English teams for cricket and rugby union were educated at private schools. The occurrence of privately educated players is increasing, for example, 11 of England's 2013 Rugby World Cup squad attended fee-paying schools, but in 2015, this had risen to 20. In 2019, much has been made in the press of Kyle Sinckler, a black English Rugby Union player from south London, who admits that no-one from his family or housing estate played rugby. Even his school did not play rugby (The Guardian, 2019a). Meanwhile, the director of the Sports Think Tank, Andy Reed says: 'There has been a continual downgrading of the importance of PE and sport in state schools,' as reported in The Guardian (2014).

In the same year, Ofsted (2014) called on state schools to urgently improve their quality and quantity of competitive sport. The report urged the government, schools and sports governing bodies to be proactive in improving the "unacceptable" percentage of state school pupils succeeding at the top level in major sports. The report also mentioned that, where a minority of state schools took sport seriously, these schools had witnessed improved

academic performance. Yet, the Ofsted report said that too few state schools recognised the wider values that competitive sport could provide to pupils, citing that only 13% of headteachers said that they expected all pupils to take part in competitive sport.

‘Heads who treat competitive sport with suspicion or as an optional extra are not only denying youngsters the clear dividends that come with encouraging them to compete, they are also cementing the social inequality that holds our nation back.’ (Sir Michael Wilshaw, Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools as cited in Ofsted, 2014, p.2)

With Ofsted reporting a correlation between the quality of competitive sport provision and wider academic achievement, schools were encouraged to embed competitive sport into the ‘school ethos’ and to foster links with local and professional sports clubs.

Another ECA, Debating, which figured significantly in the accounts (interviews 15- 16), is also dominated by private fee-paying schools. The Independent School Parent website (2019) claims:

‘It is from the British parliamentary tradition that much of today’s debating takes its inspiration. Competitive debating is a permanent fixture in the extra-curricular calendars of schools and universities across the world. Often the best schools create the best debaters: Eton, Westminster, St Paul’s and Dulwich College dominate the schools debating circuit.’

In an article entitled, ‘The struggle to take debating beyond elite private schools’, The Economist (2018) reported that, whilst more state schools were offering debating as an activity, private schools were dominating competitions more than ever with six taking the activity very seriously, going to the lengths ‘to hire international debating superstars to tutor their pupils’. In 2015, Eton College opened a debating chamber that cost £18m (\$27m). Twenty British prime ministers have been educated at Eton College. The rate that Eton produces British Prime Ministers rose recently with Boris Johnson in 2019 becoming the fifth Prime Minister since 1945 educated at Eton College. In the past decade, the English Speaking Union’s annual debating competition in England was won eight times by teams from private schools (The Economist, 2018).

Field reveals the process of socio-economics in determining ECA engagement. The proximal process of an adult in triggering a child to participate in ECA emphasises the relational nature of the notion of engagement and, in particular, the proactive role of the adult

approaching the child and instigating the child's entry into a new field of experience. The adult has engaged the child in the triggering stage, but we cannot assume that the child is yet interested, motivated or particularly involved in the ECA

## **6.2 Sustaining ECA Engagement. Stage One: The Zone of Proximal Development**

The child, having been invited/selected into the field, is a novice to the game played within the field. Given the child's possible negative experiences of school, the possible onset of learned helplessness through repeated failure (Downey & Condrón, 2016; Downey, Yoon & Martin, 2018; Seligman, 1975), the first impressions of the ECA are paramount in determining what happens next. The opening sessions of the game, the atmosphere, the structuring of the activity, how the other children in the ECA interact with the new child, are paramount in influencing the child's levels of ECA engagement, perseverance and general feelings of wanting to be there. These interactions and levels of perceived performance within the new field of ECA must be acknowledged in the light of: (1) the dominance of the role of adults at this stage of development, and (2) middle childhood representing the foundation of a child's conception of competence.

The dominance of the role of adults in middle childhood (Oberle et al., 2014) might be particularly effective because four practitioners (Interview 2,3,9,11) referred to ECA affording distinct and positive relationships between themselves and the child that were separate and more personal than within the usual classroom dynamics. This more personal level between the child and adult in an ECA setting might further increase the potential influence of the adult.

One major theme was being goal-oriented activity, that is either competition or project structured activity. Thirteen ECAs were competition based, and three were project based. Whether debating against other schools in a competition, or representing school in a sport's match, art competitions or having a determined attitude to learn how to ride a bike, these ECAs were driven by improving performance both individually and as a group. Another theme was that the practitioners who ran these ECAs had a personal interest in the activity. Mishra (2015) studied how award-winning teachers function creatively in their classrooms. This research, which interviewed eight National Teacher of the Year award winners/finalists, revealed how these teachers incorporated their hobbies and 'habits of mind' into teaching.

The conclusions were that excellent teachers transfer their creative tendencies from their outside avocations/interests into their teaching practices. In contrast, some after-school clubs might be used as simply a vehicle to occupy time before the child is taken home. An art club, for example, could be where the children are provided with some art materials whilst the adult in charge of the session marks work at their desk taking little interest in what is produced or how the children can improve. This type of ECA functions more as a filler of time before someone turns up to collect the child from school. There are no goal-oriented tasks, little feedback and limited learning. However, if the ECA is governed by a project and with the practitioner interested in the activity, then the practitioner's interest in the performance of the children is elevated to the task in hand and how best to improve performance. Competency levels are more assured of improving in this scenario.

The newly invited child, in Bourdieu's terms, enters a previously unknown field and is presented with an objective. However, the achievement of this objective is not assured. The intricacies of the sequence of experiences that now unfold may dictate the ECA trajectory of this child throughout their education and lifetime. With the themes of goals, feedback, and mastery running throughout these stories it is important to unravel an explanation of how these ECA successes were achieved. I shall turn my attention to the processes that drive the child's performativity, their levels of competence and how these are transformed from a child's entry level in the field to where they can potentially achieve.

With sustaining themes of competition, feedback and praise, and representing the school, I searched for a theory that could explain notions of progress, accomplishment, competency building and proficiency in learners. I had identified the first stage of sustaining as being practitioner led and therefore oriented my choice of theory on pedagogical practice. Vygotsky's learning theory, especially the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978, 1997), provides best-fitting theoretical insight to explain the first stage of the ECA sustaining engagement to these stories. The concept of ZPD emphasises the social aspects of learning by recognising the role of a 'teacher' for a learner to realise their full potential. ZPD emphasises the enabling role of the practitioner within the process of engagement.

I was attracted to Vygotsky because of his concept of relative achievement, which emphasises the importance of assessing achievement in relation to the starting point. Relative achievement is a useful concept to measure the success and mastery levels in these ECA stories. Many of the disadvantaged children facing adversity in the twenty accounts were struggling academically. With the exception of interview 11, none of the stories featured a child who demonstrated prodigious talent in their ECA. Relative achievement led Vygotsky



to introduce the notion of ZPD. It relates to the differences between where the child/student currently is situated in terms of ability, (the ability of the child when ECA is first triggered) and where the child could be. The implications being that a child could gain a higher degree of learning by exploiting their learning potential. Vygotsky believed that this learning potential is best developed through interaction with an adult.

When the newly invited child first engages with the ECA, they present an *actual* level of development, this being the level of competence that this child has reached. Vygotsky (1978, 1997) thought that the level of *potential* development is the level of development that the newly initiated child is capable of reaching under the guidance of the practitioner and/or in collaboration with other children who are already established members of the ECA field. The level of potential development is what Vygotsky called the zone of proximal development (ZPD). It is in the ZPD level that learning (mastery, achievement) takes place; we may call this the learning zone. It comprises cognitive structures that are still in the process of maturing, but which can only mature under the guidance of the practitioner and in collaboration with other members of the ECA field.

On the other hand, we should not assume that cognitive functions are self-generating. They require experiences and pedagogic guidance to be assimilated or accommodated. According to Waenerlund et al. (2016), these newly founded cognitive experiences, when supported by caring adults, contribute to the development of pragmatic and constructive self-systems that will assist as anchors in future attempts to deal with obstacles and problems. A major task of the supportive adult at this stage is to help the child spend time in a zone of ‘just manageable challenge’ (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). But creating this optimal learning zone is a moving target, requiring continual readjustment to keep tipping children away from experiences of threat and toward experiences of challenge (Vygotsky, 1978, 1997; Wertsch, 1984). So it is that children’s perceptions of their skills are matched against realistic challenges in order to promote a positive mood which is related to personal achievement. This resonates with Macpherson et al. (2016) who found that children needed to be engaged in tasks that match optimal levels of skill and challenge in order to build interest.

### **6.2.1 Proximal Processes Influencing Internal Processes**

Learning to perform in an ECA cannot be seen just a product of assimilation and accommodation of new knowledge; it is the relational process by which the child is engaged into the field. Vygotsky (1987) argued that all cognitive functions originate in, and therefore

must be explained as, products of social interactions. For a child new to the ECA field, these social interactions are with practitioner and the other children within the ECA field. Vygotsky wrote that every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first it appears in the social level between people 'interpsychological' and, later on, on the inside the child 'intrapsychological' (Vygotsky,1987 p.211). It is the social interactions within the field that will prompt the child's internal functioning.

Vygotsky's notion of the external *interpsychological* influencing the internal *intrapsychological* provokes the idea of *engagement* being a constant dynamic between the teacher, the activity, the context, and the child.

It also prompts the idea that engagement in middle childhood, is triggered and sustained through adults, with important inferences for the route to resilience. Middle childhood with the onset of ideas of competency vis-a-vis our peers is where the influence of adults in the uptake of activities is at its most potent, before diminishing in adolescence.

### **6.2.2 Collaborative Goal-Oriented Activity**

Levitin (1982) noted that human activity is distinguished by its nature to be goal oriented. The performative dynamic of Vygotsky's ZPD requires a sense of direction. As previously noted, a theme of all twenty ECAs was that they were based on projects, or on entered competitions. To this end, I consider that they shared a theme of being goal oriented. A feature of ZPD is its emphasis on collaborative activity. The practitioner, the new child, and other club members are engaged in a collaborative activity oriented toward fulfilling a specific goal. The ZPD itself is created on the need for collaboration and assistance in accomplishing a specific activity directed towards a pre-established goal. The interactions between the participants engaged in a joint activity lead to psychological development as the less competent individual, the new child, internalises the interactional patterns of the ECA field. The more competent individuals, in turn, also develop as the moving force of the interaction evolves. This mechanism of development underlies the argument of Burmenskaia (1997) that all types of psychological development are possible only through activity. Cognition and other psychological phenomena range beyond the individual to include the other participants and cultural artefacts in the shared activity. The consciousness of the child does not reside solely within their body but extends across the setting, tasks, and the other participants in the ECA. This leads to psychological development for everyone involved in the activity, which in turn make new levels of activities possible.

It is important to understand what Vygotsky meant by the word 'social.' It is not purely the dyadic interactions between two people, the child and the practitioner (that is, interpsychological). For Vygotsky, the social involves larger contexts, such as family historical dimensions, much in the way that Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) emphasise the proximal processes within a child's ecology that extend from family, to school and beyond. As Rogoff and her colleagues (1993) point out, the child's participation within the ZPD has a societal basis that goes beyond the immediate interpsychological level of the ECA functioning. Further factors of the participants' lives, important historical events, and values and belief systems that the child inhabits beyond school affect not only what goes on in the zone, but also how easily the child may enter and exit from the ECA. With this in mind, we must consider societal forces and influences beyond the interpsychological level of the child's ECA functioning that may affect their intrapsychological impact.

Through the relational collaborative communicative mechanism of the ZPD, within the field of the ECA, the child co-constructs, with the help of the practitioner and other members of the ECA, the appropriate and routine procedural practices to become a competent member of the ECA field (Christ & Wang, 2008; Matusov, 2001). This is achieved through the goal-oriented activity of the ECA. The collaborative aspect of the ZPD learning is a process of (1) practitioner structuring of the activity and (2) peer interaction, for example, new members being instructed by children who, having participated in the ECA for a longer period, now play the role of club ambassadors.

The goal-oriented aspect of the ECA necessitates feedback on behalf of the practitioner to facilitate the child's and the group's progress. It also requires the child's mastery of the activity and the acknowledgement/praising of achievement that is bestowed by the practitioner, and then subsequently the head of school (for example, school assembly, representing the school, school newsletter) and wider community (for example, newspaper). In this 'cycle of positivity' (Interview 2) the child begins to feel empowered and valued both within the ECA and the school. For example, through successful engagement with the ECA the children discussed in interview 2 and 11 had become school role models.

The early sustaining phase of the ECA is heavily influenced by the practitioner practice. The ZPD within the ECA field is nevertheless now beginning to impact upon the child, that is, the intrapsychological impacting upon the interpsychological (Vygotsky, 1987). It is at this point, through gradual familiarity of how things work, how people perform, a sense of what is required, an increasing understanding and familiarity of how the game is

played (Bourdieu, 1990; Thomson, 2014) and crucially, the will to persevere, that the child's behaviour and performance becomes more regular to the rules and ways of the ECA field.

### 6.2.3 Fun in Goal-Oriented Tasks

A sense of pleasure appears crucial in sustaining ECA. Fun was cited 21 times within six of the interviews as part of the sustaining phase. Enjoy<sup>1</sup> was mentioned 33 times. 'Having a laugh' received sixteen ticks, placing this third equal beside 'Foster their talents' (16 ticks) and 'Develop life skills' (16 ticks) and behind 'Make friends and mix with other children/YPs' (17 ticks) and 'Highlight achievements' (19 ticks).

Interviewee 1 summed up their account as: 'Have a laugh – They are children. Adult enthusiasm.'

This perception of the importance of *fun* also resonates in the literature review, which illustrated that an essential ingredient in sustaining engagement is *fun* (Crane & Temple, 2014; Weiss & Williams, 2004). Fun may be equated with immediate gratitude, but also with enjoyment and expectation within the ongoing task. Fun, as the findings suggest, was also associated with being out of class and the freedom to deliver a less static and didactic delivery of knowledge compared to the classroom. Fun was also equated with performing the activity. To install fun, the essential skill is for the practitioner to pitch the ECA at a level not too banal to produce boredom nor too difficult to provoke frustration and dissatisfaction from the child and other group members. In a season-long examination of fun among children aged 7-15 years playing sport, Wankel and Sefton (1989) found that fun was a positive mood state related to personal achievement. Our perceptions that our skills are matched against realistic challenges promotes enjoyment. This adds the dimension of fun to the earlier findings of Macpherson et al. (2016) regarding arts participation, that children need to be engaged in tasks that match optimal levels of skill and challenge in order to facilitate learning.

Fun is not something that naturally occurs but is created by the structure and atmosphere of the task. Collins et al. (2016) found that fun was considered a positive mood state related to personal achievement and children's perceptions that their skills were matched against realistic challenges. Fun was the most cited intrinsic motivator in Crane and Temple's (2014) scoping study for sport participation among children and young people (see also Sirard et al., 2006; Whitehead & Biddle, 2008; Yan & McCulloch, 2004). Crane and Temple

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<sup>1</sup> Including enjoy, enjoyment and enjoying

found that the two most important factors related to dropout rates in ‘organised sport’ for children and youth were (1) participants’ perceptions of their competence and (2) their enjoyment of sport. In their study, children and youths reported that they had dropped out from their sport when they considered it was no longer fun. Similar to the findings of Crane and Temple (2014), Weiss and Williams (2004) found that children tend to be drawn toward areas where they perceive themselves to be competent and shy away from areas where they feel unsuccessful. The optimal level of challenge for a newly invited child who has consistently failed at school will require a deft touch. Therefore, fun is an essential ingredient in the mechanism of ZPD to sustaining engagement.

#### **6.2.4 Feedback**

Eleven practitioners highlighted feedback as a key element to sustaining the child’s engagement. Four practitioners also mentioned feedback in the form of encouragement and praise emanating from peers within the school club. Peer feedback might not only sustain the new child’s engagement but also confirms the older members’ status within the ECA field.

Sadler (1989) claimed the power of feedback can close the gap between where the student is and where they are aiming. This places feedback as a vital mechanism within Vygotsky’s ZPD. Hattie and Timberley (2007) equate feedback as a consequence of performance. In their meta-analysis, Hattie and Timberley (2007) conclude that feedback appears to have the most impact when goals are specific and challenging. Their analysis showed the highest effect sizes involved students receiving informative feedback about a task and how to do it more effectively. Lower effect sizes were related to praise, rewards, and punishment. As Black and Wiliam (1998) concluded, ‘the provision of challenging assignments and extensive feedback lead to greater student engagement and higher achievement’ (p. 13). In a qualitative analysis, Hooper, Haimovitz, Wright, Murphy and Yeager (2016) suggest that teachers who recognised struggle, effort, and negative emotions, like frustration as natural and constructive parts of the learning process, helped create ‘a growth mindset’ classroom culture. Teachers who saw themselves accountable for the success of their students (for example, the idea that ‘Together we will make sure you master this’) were more effective in their feedback to teachers who put the onus on the student to solve the problem and work harder (for example, ‘You have to be the one to put in the work to practice and study’).

Whilst Hattie and Timberley (2007) considered praise less effective than information on how better to perform the task, praise was seen to be vital in the twenty stories in this thesis. 'Highlighting achievements' in the Resilience Framework received 19 ticks making it the most widely acknowledged approach. Highlighting achievements was paramount to confirming success for these children in their ECA. Highlighting achievements contributed to the child's confidence and self-esteem. Highlighting achievements may well contribute to bolstering the child's sense of value, commitment and place within the field. Receiving praise may be a particularly effective form of feedback in middle childhood, in which notions of self-esteem and identity for the child are beginning to develop. Receiving praise may also be an effective sustaining mechanism for a child who has not chosen to participate in the ECA but has been selected/invited. Receiving praise from the adult who has invited the child through the gate into the ECA field may legitimate the child's sense of now belonging to the field and the adult's justification in allowing them into the field.

Highlighting success and receiving praise may also be effective in countering past histories of 'learned helplessness' through repeated school failure. Promoting mastery-oriented children (Blackwell et al., 2007; Dweck, 1999) may initially require healthy doses of praise. Positive feedback and highlighting achievement are a generative process within ZPD in the initial sustaining phase of ECA engagement, which facilitates the route to the child mastering the task and successfully entering the field.

### **6.2.5 Improved Competency**

Finding a path towards mastery in school could be a turning point for a child, creating a 'positive chain reaction' (Hart & Heaver, 2013). We might envisage these virtuous or positive cycles countering vicious or negative cycles. To use a weighing scale image, the task is to remove negative weights or to add to the side with positive weights which counteract the effect of negative weights. In either event, the balance is the same, leading to a reduced impact of negative factors. Competency, the command or grasp of an activity or subject, is an essential ingredient in ZPD. Competency is also linked to fun and enjoyment (Crane & Temple 2014; Weiss & Williams, 2004); we are naturally drawn to activities where we feel competent. Building competency in an ECA is integral to sustaining the child's participation and interest in the ECA.

The twenty stories documented improved performance levels of each child. Interviews 1,2,5,6,7,10,11,12,16,18, and 19 identified experiencing success/achievement as

sustaining the child's participation. A recurrent theme was that ECA offered alternative avenues to success (Interview 1,5,10,17, and 19) for the child, especially in contrast to classroom learning. The level of task management and performance feedback was paramount to guaranteeing the direction and intensity of the child's engagement. The level of mastery and success must be ongoing at a tolerable level to stimulate interest and continued desire to participate. The skill here is the practitioner's structuring of the activity; optimising the learning and increased competency of the child. Essential to the process of ZPD is mastery; an acknowledged sense of progress in the ECA. If the child does not progress or perceive adequate progress, then frustration can arise and engagement in the activity may diminish or terminate. Not only the level of instruction is crucial, but also the ability of the child to perform.

It is important to recognise that five of the children in these stories would appear to have been unrealistically challenged or unwisely matched within the ECA: (1) In interview 1 the partially sighted girl deciding to participate in the art club; (2) In interview 5, the boy with 'serious allergies' and a 'weight problem' agreeing each session to walk 30 minutes to the marshes carrying a bucket; (3) In interview 15, a boy who had a 'slight speech impediment' and whose first language was not English was selected to join the debating society; (4) In interview 20, the Persuade practitioner mentioned in their interview that the child's teacher had said that the girl never spoke; (5) In interview 6, the boy with a weight issue who could not ride a bicycle chose to join the bike club. Of these six, two children made exceptional progress. These stories highlight the potential of ECA to significantly improve competency levels for children facing adversity through disability and physical challenges. Vygotsky's notion of relative progress is particularly useful in these instances by allowing us to be cognisant of where a child has come from, their initial competencies and their emerging competencies. In the "right fit" ECA, children with disabilities and learning barriers may well prosper and progress exponentially. In interview 11, the girl invited to the lunch time running club progressed to representing her county. In interview 18, the girl was voted most progressed debater within London. Competency is not finding talent or a champion, it is building progress from the level of entry. Many of these stories show significant leaps in competencies from the point of entry into the ECA. These surges in competency were often greater than exhibited by the most proficient. The child who always wins the race and whose time has improved from fourteen and half seconds to fourteen has not experienced a performance rise as substantial as the child who initially completed the race in twenty seconds and finished last but who now completes the distance in seventeen seconds and is no

longer last. Several of the stories indicate that poor performance, a low level of competency at the triggering stage of ECA engagement may well provide a noteworthy leap in progress if nurtured. These competency boosts can be meaningful in sustaining the child's engagement.

Progress was perceived by the practitioners to be made by the children in all twenty stories. These ECA avenues to success are vital in building positive school experiences, especially to children who may be struggling to succeed elsewhere in the school curriculum. Good school experiences influence trajectories of what happens next. These experiences influence performance, self-esteem and self-efficacy. How an individual functions in one domain often has implications for other domains (Masten & Obradovic, 2008).

Six practitioners referred to improving academic performance for the child since participating in the ECA (Interview 2, 6, 11, 12, 13, 17). These findings support previous research that suggests that disadvantaged children benefit most from ECA (Morris, 2015; Nelson, 2016). This would point to ECA engagement as an effective intervention in closing the gap of academic achievement between richer and poorer pupils. Participating in organised sports was also positively linked to social, emotional and behavioural outcomes (Bourassa et al., 2017; Griffiths et al., 2010; Marsh and Kleitman, 2003; Snyder et al., 2010;) and significantly, these benefits were especially linked to disadvantaged children (Chanfreau et al., 2016). These findings are especially significant when considering effective school interventions using Pupil Premium funding. Chanfreau et al. (2016) suggested that there were academic benefits on children's Key Stage 2 attainment from participating in out-of-school activities (for example, breakfast clubs, after-school clubs, sports activities, music and art lessons). Their results showed that sports clubs and 'other' ECA participation was positively associated with attainment outcomes at age 11 (Chanfreau et al., 2016, p. 24). Among economically disadvantaged children, after-school clubs emerged in the Chanfreau et al., study as the only organised activity associated with both higher Key Stage 2 attainment and prosocial skills. The findings revealed that disadvantaged children who had attended an after-school club at ages 5, 7 and 11 had significantly higher total point scores on average as compared with those who had never attended an after-school club. The authors found that attending an after-school club was not significantly related to progress among the non-disadvantaged, but it was positively related to progress among disadvantaged children.

The findings of Chanfreau et al. (2016) confirm earlier findings of Morris (2015); Morris concluded that the extra benefit afforded to disadvantaged pupils from ECA acted as a form of resource compensation helping to reduce the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students. Increased participation in ECA provides access to resources that



disadvantaged children and young people often go without, such as ‘constructive mental challenges, advantageous communication patterns, safe and dependable recreation space, and expanding social networks populated with driven youths and socially influential nonfamilial adults’ (p.286). Exposure to these previously unavailable resources is a beneficial compensation for young people but less so for their more advantaged peers who have experienced these resources since birth.

Similarly, Gilligan (2007) sees the link between committed adults in ECA and educational progress for children in care. Gilligan sees that ‘connectedness to nonparental adults’ offers the prospects of ‘better outcomes in terms of scholastic success, social-emotional wellbeing, connections to social capital’ (page 93). Gilligan suggests that ‘spare time activities’ may be more likely to generate educational benefit with disadvantaged young people because they are different from schooling.

The findings of these interviews concur with the conclusions from Chanfreau et al. (2016), Morris (2015) and Gilligan (2007). Together, they present a number of implications for policy makers and practitioners concerned with educational outcomes, and the effective use of Pupil Premium funding. For children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, who have lower ECA take-up, school-based clubs offer an accessible route for learning experiences with the potential benefits for social as well as academic development. For children facing adversity from disability and barriers to learning, ECA offers routes to competency building that may well reduce these adversities and build confidence and self-esteem.

### **6.2.6 Multiple Voices**

We can identify goal-oriented tasks, feedback, mastery and fun as important ingredients within the sustaining mechanism of ZPD. However, in understanding social factors beyond school we should consider the notion of ‘voice’ within the ZPD (Cheyne, & Tarulli, 1999, 2012; Eun, Knotek, & Heining-Boynton, 2008). Vygotsky thought that the self is forged in the ‘zone of proximal development’, where children build learning partnerships with adults to master a skill inside the zone. The child then goes off on their own, speaking aloud to replace the voice of the adult, now gone from the field. As mastery increases, this ‘self-talk’ becomes internalised. This voice, at first uttered aloud but finally only internal – was, from Vygotsky’s perspective, the engine of development and consciousness itself (Ren, Wang & Jarrold, 2016; Vygotsky, 1987). Herein lies an important distinction between

Vygotsky and Piaget: Piaget claimed that when the brain developed, then learning occurred (Piaget, 1970, 1983), whereas Vygotsky posited that learning occurs first and then the brain develops (Vygotsky, 1978, 1987).

The definition of voice provided by Vygotsky situates two participants within the zone, namely that of the more competent and the less competent. Cheyne and Tarulli (1999) refer to the more competent voice of the practitioner as the first voice. The voice of the less competent, the child is the second voice. But we need to add another voice into the dynamic of ZPD. The voice of the invisible and inaudible participant is the third voice. This third voice we may define as the larger context, such as the historical and familial forces, which can shape and interfere with the social interactions between the first and second voices (Eun et al., 2008). The third voice is what we might call the invisible cultural voice of home, which is always present and exerts its power, at times contradictory, over the two voices of the teacher and learner. This has important implications on what Reay (2002 p. 222) calls ‘an intolerable burden of psychic repertoire work’ that some pupils experience if they are to side step what Bourdieu calls ‘the duality of the self’ (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 511 cited in Reay, 2002 p.222) on the child if there are significant detachments or disjunctures (Ingram, 2011) between the voices of fields in school and fields outside school. This has enormous repercussions on habitus formation and the wide repertoire required to play/adapt to these varied fields.

In the next section, I discuss the second phase of sustaining, where the child begins to respond to the ECA field and the game they encounter.

In this stage I have identified ZPD as a proximal process in sustaining ECA engagement for the child. ZPD being the level of *potential* development the newly initiated child is capable of reaching under the guidance of a more knowledgeable other(s). Once inside the field of ECA the structuring and nature of the ECA influences the child’s response to the activity. Rates of progress are judged by initial levels and manageable steps to improvement, making the route to competency enjoyable but also meaningful within a goal-oriented culture or driven by competition and performance. This is achieved also by constructive feedback allowing the child to understand what needs to be done to improve. Other, more competent members of the ECA also contribute towards feedback. I now turn towards what Vygotsky called the intrapsychological (Vygotsky,1987 p.211), which is the child’s response to these pedagogic experiences.

### 6.3 Sustaining ECA Engagement. Stage Two. Habitus Formation

In offering *Field* as a theoretical explanation for triggering ECA engagement (themes of *Invitation/Selection* and *Changing the Timetable*), I subsequently posited Vygotsky's ZPD as the most potent theory to explain the first stage of sustaining ECA engagement. ZPD could account for the practitioner practice in developing the child's level of competency (themes of *competition, feedback-praise-achievement, representing the school*). Bourdieu's notion of *Habitus* provides a good fit to explain the child's response (theme of *Ownership/responsibility*) to *Field* and ZPD.

In the first stage of ECA sustainment, it is the practitioner's practice, the ZPD, which stimulates the child's commitment and enthusiasm towards the activity. The process of ZPD secures the child's progress and mastery and, therefore, levels of fun to ensure competency. In stage two, the child immersed into the ECA field increasingly employs their emerging agency in the engagement process. In this section I discuss the child's response to stage one of engagement and suggest that Bourdieu's notion of habitus provides the best theoretical explanation of the responses accounted in the interviews. Habitus, the dispositions which internalise our social location and which orient our actions within a field (Noble & Watkins 2003) offers an explanatory tool to explore the child's sense of place and functioning within the ECA field.

With sustainment, the child is adopting a way of acting or habitus in alignment with the field of the ECA. Habitus 'refers to something historical, it is linked to individual history' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 86). Individual histories, therefore, are vital to understanding the concept of habitus. Habitus is embedded in the past influencing the everyday. However, habitus is also emergent, being absorbent and responsive to events and experiences that are internalised and become yet another layer to add to those from earlier socializations. In critical realism, the detection of processes, such as field and ZPD, beneath the level of description, allows the notion of *emergence* to enter our explanation of events. For example, the emergence of a child's habitus through sustained experience of performing in a field. The process of a child participating in an ECA over a sustained period may provide an emergence of an identity for that child that cannot be explained merely by the constituent parts of the child and the activity. The laminated nature of social forces guide and shape a child's behaviour and, therefore, there is the potential emergence (development) of a new phenomenon from the combination of these forces. For example, the habitus assimilated in the family is the basis of the structuring of school experiences, yet this habitus is transformed by the action of the

school. Therefore, although habitus is a product of early childhood experience, and in particular, socialisation within the family, it is continually re-structured by a child's encounters with the outside world (Di Maggio, 1979). The range of possibilities inscribed in a habitus can be envisaged as a continuum. The concept of field gives habitus a dynamic quality:

‘The relation between habitus and field operates in two ways. On one side, it is a relation of conditioning: the field structures the habitus, which is the product of the embodiment of the immanent necessity of the field (or of a hierarchy of intersecting fields). On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge or cognitive construction: habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense or with value, in which it is worth investing one's energy’ (Bourdieu, in Wacquant, 1989, p. 44).

The notion of habitus provides a method for analysing both ‘the experience of social agents and the objective structures which make this experience possible’ (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 782, cited in Reay 2004). Habitus is a means of viewing the restructuring adaptive performance of the individual within the divergent fields of interactions and activity.

Bourdieu likens habitus to a ‘feel for the game’ (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990). Because our practice is always socially situated, this practical sense is specific to the field in which we are acting at that moment. The child's practice is embedded in the requirements of the ECA field, which is mastered in varying degrees by its participants. It is the field that bestows ‘obligatory positions’ that engender and requires the individual to respond in certain ways (Widick, 2003).

Bourdieu was fond of making sporting analogies when writing about habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990). Bourdieu's favourite example was that of the competent tennis player (Bourdieu, 1990, 1993; Noble & Watkins, 2003; Sayer, 2009). The player can perform skilful manoeuvres without thinking much about the details of what they are doing, through ‘protension’ rather than calculation. The tennis player does not spend time deliberating over how best to return the ball but is already moving to return it before they think about it. Through habit and experience an automatic pilot is continually making adjustments. Tennis movement becomes a habit.

However, to get to this stage, the player must practice regularly and actively monitor their performance and correct faults. The player exerts an internal conversation (Bourdieu, 1990; Noble & Watkins 2003; Sayer 2009). We might label this an internal feedback.

We must always be aware that habitus alignment with a field is dependent upon the availability of the field, because habitus is formed in response to the field. Habitus is a result of access, and exclusion from fields. The processes for triggering must be present. In Mathew Syed's book *You are awesome* (2018), an account of how the author, who describes himself as an 'ordinary' boy, took up table tennis and through developing a 'mindset' to work hard and eventually became Olympic champion. What Syed pays less attention to in his story are the proximal processes that triggered his engagement in table tennis. His father enjoyed table tennis and the garage at home was dedicated to holding matches between him and his son. Secondly Syed speaks of a teacher at school 'with a passion for ping pong' who ran the table tennis school club. What's more, just by chance, at the bottom of the road to where Syed lived there was a community table tennis club, which he also joined. You could say that table tennis found Mathew. There were many favourable things in place in Mathew's world to guide him towards table tennis. There were no 'habitus disjunctures' (Ingram 2011 p.10) between the voices of school and home in Mathew engaging in sustained table tennis.

Habitus implies both a sense of being and also a sense of place (Bourdieu, 1989). Revisiting the notion of habitus, Wacquant (2016, p.68) stresses that habitus is not static but 'a multi-layered and dynamic set of schemata', which 'records, stores and prolongs the influence of the diverse environments *successfully* [my italics] traversed during one's existence'. In this way, habitus is not only *emergent*, it is constantly *emerging* in relation to field dynamics (Decoteau, 2016). Habitus is 'the set of dispositions one acquires in early childhood, slowly and imperceptibly, through familial osmosis and familiar immersion ... it constitutes our baseline social personality' (Wacquant, 2013, p.193).

In the stories highlighted in this thesis, through the sustained experience within the ZPD of the ECA, the child's habitus is transforming, adapting to the way of the game (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990). The formation of the child's ECA habitus, therefore, explains the development of regularities in practice by the child in the field of ECA and a set of emerging dispositions that 'orients choices' (Bourdieu 1974, 1977, 1990)). These dispositions are created through a repertoire of acquired behaviours that range from gestures and body movements to more complex inter- and intra-personal actions of choosing, planning, perceiving, feeling, thinking, speaking, communicating, writing, and evaluating (Bourdieu, 1990). In interview 12, the practitioner spoke of the child 'using the correct language, the mathematical language'. Through the continued use of these actions, the habitus of the ECA field emerges as an embodied phenomenon from habitual behaviours, rather than from conscious reflections on the world which is more consistent with new members. In other

words, the habitus is slowly embodied by the child through repeated engagement in the mental and embodied habits. The emergence of the habitus from habitual actions allows the ECA to become part of the ‘natural’ order of life, a nonreflective and repetitive way of doing, thinking, feeling and becoming, as Bourdieu sees the tennis player habitually moving towards the ball. Similarly, Thomson (2014) sees habitus ‘as a particular arrangement of dispositions acquired from participating in a particular field’. From this participation a person will:

- take particular things for granted
- believe that particular things are important (Thomson, 2014, p.14)

From these twenty stories we can identify the newly invited child entering the field and through sustained immersion and, driven by ZPD, the child plays an increasingly significant agentive role in their own development and in the running of the ECA. In interview 2, for example, the practitioner spoke of the boy becoming more capable of seeing his own success rather than being told he had done well. The child is more capable of understanding the steps required to achieve. The child is beginning to self-regulate their learning.

A significant role the practitioner now plays in the latter stages of the sustaining period is to allocate the child a role within the club. The child is no longer a novice but a confident member of the club. In interview 17, the boy was elected club president. In interview 7, the child was given extra responsibility in the club and made vice-captain for matches. In interview 19, the girl was chosen to be team captain. In interview 1, the girl was asked to help the practitioner run an art club for Key Stage 1 children.

The child in the sustaining period begins to feel a sense of belonging to their school club. This supports Daly and Gilligan (2013) acknowledgement that ‘spare time activities’ which may involve ECA, can help to promote a sense of belonging to a valued social group/mattering to people who are important to the child/and counting for something in a context that matters to the child. This is an essential component of habitus, the sense of place and where one fits in. This sense of belonging is further strengthened through the process of the child acquiring a status within the ECA.

This sense of belonging and the acquired habitus of a senior club member – gaining one’s stripes within the club – now allowed children to begin initiating younger/newer members in the activity and providing praise to their peers, as was recognised in interviews 1,5,6,8,9,10,12 and 17.

Furthermore, six practitioners (Interview 1, 2, 5, 10, 12, & 13), without being prompted, spoke of the child subsequently choosing to join other ECA school clubs. The child's newly formed ECA habitus allowing them to choose other fields of ECA. From these examples, we can see how the triggering mechanism of an adult inviting/selecting a child who had previously never participated into an ECA field, resulted in a child subsequently choosing to participate in further ECA fields.

I am aware that I have not included Bourdieu's notion of social, cultural and economic capital into my theoretical explanation of ECA engagement. There is no doubt about the theoretical linkage between the concept of capital and habitus. But habitus is not a capital per se. In detecting the selection to a field of ECA as a theory to explain triggering ECA engagement it was more plausible that I would put forward the child's habitus response to this field selection rather than the child's social, cultural or economic capital response. We must always be aware that habitus, rather than social, capital and economic capital, is an alignment to a field - a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990). Ritzer (1996, p.545) says "Bourdieu offers a distinctive theory of the relationship between agency and structure within the context of a concern for the dialectical relationship between habitus and field."

I was also persuaded to offer habitus rather than capital as an explanation as habitus evokes an idea of emergence and the embodiment of ways of action in response to events and experiences that are internalised (Bourdieu, in Wacquant, 1989, p. 44). In critical realism, the detection of processes, such as field and ZPD and habitus, beneath the level of description, allows the notion of *emergence* to enter our explanation of events. For example, the emergence of a child's habitus through sustained experience of performing in a field.

However, in my endeavour to present a theoretical explanation of ECA engagement I am also aware of the shortcomings of this epistemological stance and design. It can be accused of the dominance of structural determinism at the expense of individual agency. The concept of the habitus, in particular, has been subject to charges of objectivising determinism (Alexander, 1995) Barnes (2000) argues that such difficulties emerge because - despite Bourdieu's struggles to avoid determinism - he still subscribes habitus to individual persons all adopting the same rules with little differentiation to individualism. In other words, there is a danger of saying that individuals internalise their shared conditions in the same fashion. But as Barnes admits to operate within the 'rules of the game' also depends upon the active alignment 'coordination and standardization of practical actions' by networks of interdependent social agents 'who profoundly affect each other as they interact' (Barnes 2000, p.64, 66). This profound interaction, that Barnes refers to, is demonstrated in the

accounts of successful triggering and sustaining ECA engagement, the practitioner, other field members and the child.

### **6.3.1 Field and Habitus Continuum**

Securing the child's continued engagement in the ECA, and other ECAs which they may have subsequently joined, is paramount in ensuring the benefits of ECA. This continuation of ECA will be decided by many factors. Does the Secondary school to which the child will transfer after Key Stage 2 offer the same ECA or other ECAs that will attract the child? The fact that the FSM child is now participating in ECA at Primary school has potentially improved their probability to continue in ECA in Secondary school (Aumetre & Poulin, 2015). With specific focus upon middle childhood, Aumetre and Poulin (2016) looked at 1038 children in middle childhood to identify the trajectories of breadth of participation in organised activities. The authors conclude that in middle childhood, parents play a greater role in the decision of joining an organised activity, but that this parental influence diminishes in adolescence. This thesis has demonstrated that, in the absence of parental influence, adults in school can significantly guide ECA engagement in middle childhood with the child potentially developing an ECA habitus to self-elect to join other ECAs. We should not forget that ECA participation tends to peak at 11–13 years (Wang & Eccles, 2012; Zimmermann-Sloutskis et al., 2010) before declining throughout adolescence. This would indicate that triggering ECA engagement may diminish beyond middle childhood and that earlier intervention to promote ECA participation would ensure greater long-term participation and an ECA habitus continuum. For many children, the role of practitioners in schools may play an important mechanism in establishing the foundations of a child's ECA habitus.

However, proximal processes are always competing against hindrances. In Interview 11, the girl had shown talent in the school running club in which she had represented her school and subsequently the county. But due to 'a chaotic home life because of her mother's mental health' the girl was unable to attend weekend running competitions. Her primary school went the extra mile and transported her to these events. If the school resource to keep the girl engaged in her running became unavailable the girl's running engagement could well be put in jeopardy. The girl's headteacher was unsure that the Secondary school she was



transitioning to after Key Stage 2 provided a running club. In significant and various ways, children's ECA engagement is dependent on outside resources and the willingness and competence of adults.

This raises the importance of the liaison between Primary schools and the child's future Secondary school. At present, the Secondary school will be informed of the child's Statutory Assessment Tests (SATs) score to evaluate the child's educational progress. SATs make comparisons between children and the average attainment expectations for their respective age group. These are only related to the core curriculum subjects, Reading, Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation, and Maths. There is no discussion of ECA. If a child has experienced success in a particular ECA in their primary school, this may well not be communicated between Primary and Secondary schools. This lack of continuum puts at risk the continued pathway of ECA success beyond year 6 for the child.

## **6.4 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter represents 'the 'theoretical re-description' of events (Bygstad & Munkfield, 2011, p.5). I have illuminated how ECA engagement in middle childhood can be effectively triggered by practitioners in both providing and selecting the child into the field of ECA. I have found Bourdieu's concept of field is helpful in providing insight into the parameters of ECA and the idea of field with its powerful metaphor of requiring access to a space and mode of activity. The first sustaining process detected was also found to be generated by the practitioner. This practitioner practice process is theoretically identified through Vygotsky's ZPD, incorporating a goal-oriented activity, feedback (both by the practitioner and other children in the ECA), peer mentoring, and collaborative learning which optimised improved competency mastery, and associated levels of enjoyment (fun). I have suggested that mastery and praise, in the form of feedback, may be particularly significant in encouraging a child to sustain the activity if the child had not experienced praise before within a school setting. ECA with its inclination towards experiential learning may be a particularly useful field for providing immediate feedback.

Another theoretical re-description was found to be the child adopting a habitus in alignment with the field of the ECA. This habitus formation was identified as the second

stage of sustaining of ECA engagement, with the child more active and confident in their ECA engagement. It is the symbiosis of field and ZPD, which helps form the child's habitus embodiment as the child learns the rules of the game and how to play. It is important for activity in ECA fields to continue to ensure the continuum of the child's habitus, especially towards and into adolescence when competing fields and voices arise.

In the next chapter, I map the findings and discussion onto the four interest theories that were highlighted in chapter 2 to see the extent to which each theory may explain the events accounted in the twenty interviews. I suggest that the term engagement, rather than interest or motivation, better expounds the events of triggering and the two stages of sustaining ECA participation identified in this chapter. The triggering of entry into the field and the two subsequent stages of engagement, ZPD and the child's habitus response is the route to the resilient outcomes of improved confidence, perseverance, academic performance and school belonging. Likewise, in the next chapter, I also map the findings of this thesis and discussion onto the EEF toolkit to evaluate the toolkit's ability and capacity to provide insight into the twenty accounts of successful ECA engagement. I end the next chapter by presenting the strengths and limitations of my research and propose future areas of research.

## **Chapter 7. Engagement... Habitus... Resilience**

I begin this chapter by evaluating the ability of four interest theories, as discussed in chapter 2, to explain the events accounted in the twenty interviews of successfully engaging a disadvantaged child in middle childhood to an ECA.

### **7.1 Expectancy/Value Theory**

As its name suggests EVT focusses on the importance of two components in promoting overall motivation. 1) Having an expectancy of being successful in an activity. 2) Possessing a value for engaging in the activity (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000; Barron & Hulleman 2015). This though is problematic for sixteen of the children in this research who had never previously participated in an ECA and were invited/selected by an adult. In these cases it is difficult to judge the child's initial expectancy or value towards the activity. EVT might be particularly relevant to why these children had previously not participated in ECA. Through past history, repeated cycles of failure in other fields, such as the classroom, a child has perhaps developed a 'learned helplessness' (Dweck 1975; Abramson & Seligman 1978) - an expectancy to perform poorly in school activities.

A child who has persistently failed requires mastery experiences and achievement to combat 'learned helplessness' and to trigger success in other domains (Masten, Herbers, Cutuli & Lafavor, 2008). In this case, it would seem fundamental for the child to be persuaded by a significant other to participate, which puts the significant other as the agent of motivation rather than the dispositional characteristics of the child. Within the context of middle childhood, a child may be developing ideas to where they fit in and cultivated an apprehension to participate even if the chance or opportunity arises. Thus the findings in this thesis would point to the expectancy and values of the practitioners in the triggering stage of ECA engagement rather than the child.

Wheeler's study (2012) found that children with a strong sporting culture had this culture transmitted through their parents. It was the parents' expectancies and values that drove their offspring's participation in ECA. But in at least three quarters of the stories highlighted in this thesis, in the absence of family extra-curricular cultures it was the school's and/or the practitioner's expectancies and values which triggered the child's engagement. As these stories demonstrate it the school and the practitioner who are fundamental in the

triggering stage of a child's ECA participation. It is the significant other who acts as the agent of motivation.

Subsequently through the practitioner and peer led ZPD within the ECA field, the child may adopt a habitus in alignment to the field. This field habitus transforms the child's expectancies and values towards the ECA. This would confirm the considerable evidence to suggest that personality traits may be dynamic, emerging and shift along developmental trajectories (Johnson, et al., 2007; Roberts 2006; Jackson et al., 2010; Cairns, et al., 2014). An emergent ECA habitus also supports research which indicates that personality traits can be altered by use of intervention (Clark et al, 2003; Krasner et al., 2009; Tang et al., 2009) – in this case the sustained immersion into a *field* of ECA experience. EVT would appear to be more relevant to the second stage of sustaining ECA indicated by the interviews in this thesis.

## **7.2 Self-Regulation Theory**

SRT is predominantly influenced by the work of Carol Dweck and colleagues (1999, 2009, 2017) on the premise of what children perceive about their own intelligence, whether it is a 'fixed entity' or a 'malleable quality' and associated with a 'growth mindset', which can be developed. A child possessing a 'growth mindset' (Dweck, 2010, 2015) is seen to be resilient when faced with failure or difficulties in learning. A 'growth mindset' delivers a child positive messages about their effort and strategy, motivating pupils to try harder, or to try a different strategy for learning. In comparison, for children with a fixed mindset, failure will send a negative message about who they are when performing tasks. This, it is argued, will damage their self-esteem and is likely to lead them to avoid the task in the future. There are clear links here with EVT and how past history can affect values and judgements to confronting new experiences. If a child has repeatedly experienced failure then the child may develop a pre-determined attitude to producing an inadequate performance 'learned helplessness' (Maier and Seligman 1976;). Past negative failures may have been the reason behind why the children investigated in this thesis had not participated before in ECA. However, other constraints may well have been active, such as children being required by their parents/carers to leave school at 3.15pm. Organising ECA's during the school day, such as at lunch time, removed this structural barrier. Eight of the schools incorporated their activities into the school day – usually at lunchtime – in order to be available for those

children who never habitually remain for after-school clubs when, historically, most ECAs occur.

As with EVT, SRT emphasises the active role of the learner, rather than the teacher (Abar & Loken, 2010; Efklides, 2011; Bjork, Dunlosky & Kornell, 2013, Greene & Azevedo, 2010; Winne, 2010; Zimmerman, 2008). Azevedo and colleagues (2010) report that several models of self-regulated learning have been proposed (Boekaerts & Niemivirta, 2000; Muis et al., 2007). These are descriptive and remind us of what a self-regulated student looks like. For example, SRT describes the self-regulated student as:

- aware not only of task requirements but also of their own requirements to optimal learning experiences (McCann & Garcia, 1999; Shernoff, 2013).
- aware of and avoiding behaviours and cognitions unfavourable to academic success; they are familiar with the strategies necessary for learning and understand how and when to exploit strategies that improve perseverance and performance (Byrnes, Miller & Reynolds, 1999; Middleton, Tallman, Hatfield & Davis, 2014; Wolters & Hussain 2015).
- regarding learning as a controllable process (Ley & Young, 1998).
- setting standards or goals to strive towards in their learning, constantly monitoring their progress toward these goals, adapting and regulating their cognition, motivation, and behaviour to reach their goals (Pintrich, 2004; Mega et al., 2014).

After the triggering stage of providing the ECA field and invitation/selection of the child into the ECA field, my abductive theoretical explanation found that that the child's interest was formed through practitioner practice (ZPD), with increasing levels of the child's competency and enjoyment. In the triggering and the first stage of sustaining ECA engagement, we need to substitute what a good learner looks like with a focus on what good practice looks like. The role of instigating a child's self-regulation is therefore switched to the practitioner. The accounts in this thesis point towards the first stage of sustaining engagement, ZPD, as highlighted in chapter 6. The pre-requisite of the interpsychological before the intrapsychological of the child's response. In this case, self-regulation requires:

- the practitioner to be aware not only of task requirements but also of their own requirements to provide optimal learning experiences.

- practitioners to be aware and avoid behaviours and cognitions unfavourable to academic success; they are familiar with the strategies necessary for learning and understand how and when to exploit strategies that improve perseverance and performance.
- practitioners to regard learning as a controllable process.
- practitioners to set standards or goals for learners to strive towards in their learning, constantly monitoring their progress toward these goals, adapting and regulating their cognition, motivation, and behaviour to reach their goals.

What SRT fails to recognise is that some children face greater adversities through exterior conditions beyond their control and with more frequency than other children and so are naturally more prone to develop a ‘learned helplessness’ and a ‘fixed entity’ perception of what they can achieve. A self-regulation model of agency may well be unrealistic to understanding social behaviour especially for children facing constant adversity. Both SRT and EVT fail to recognise the quality of the proximal processes within a child’s ecology as buffers to adversity and how these proximal processes may shape and drive a child’s motivation. In this respect, SRT theory has a strong tendency to be more focused on outcomes, such as mindset, character and descriptions of what pupils with growth mindsets and appropriate character traits, rather than on the learning processes that lead to these outcomes. In SRT, students become responsible learners for regulating their own learning and performance.

A substantial amount of resilience literature has emerged in the last two decades emphasising the level of successful coping that an individual demonstrates cannot be purely a result of personal traits but that environmental factors also facilitate or hinder adaptation to adverse circumstances (for example, Luthar & Borwn 2007; Masten 2006, 2009; Rutter 2006). But SRT situates the young person as both the cause and potential solution to the problem. There is a danger that following the growth mindset revolution of Seligman and Dweck, underachievement can be conveniently recognised as a fault of the young person rather than the emphasis placed onto the provision of pedagogic experiences that can promote these notions. Providing routes to building competencies through ECA engagement and the subsequent habitus responses to these competencies would appear to be a pedagogical route worth exploring to promote favourable outcomes described in SRT.

SRT also fails to ask questions of the accessibility of pathways to establishing a growth mindset through educational interventions that foster mastery, competence, and self-esteem. The stories in this thesis highlight that these pathways for children are established by proximal forces, principally at home and/or at school. Nor are they principally stories of a growth mindset but of the formation of a habitus, a belonging, a child's sense of place within a field of activity. After an initial invitation into an ECA by a member of the school staff, sustained engagement is then promoted through careful structuring of the activity. These indicate the crucial pathway to forming these habitus dispositions are forged by the child but through the presence of proximal processes within the child's ecology. It is the presence, strength and resilience of these proximal processes, within a school context, that allow some children to develop a habitus.

We need, therefore, to reverse the responsibility from child to practitioner and ask questions of practice and the quality of pedagogical experiences, rather than the ability of pupils to embrace character dispositions.

### **7.3 Self-Determination Theory**

Unlike EVT and SRT, SDT makes explicit how and why characteristics of social context may support or hinder a child's engagement (Opdenakker & Maulana, 2010, Ryan et al., 2008). SDT also recognises that *availability* of resources is not uniform to all learners. The availability of chance, opportunity and choice, which were lacking in both EVT and SRT are considered by SDT as part of the engagement process. This is particularly relevant to this thesis with the availability of ECA in school and the dynamics of choice being largely dictated by the school and adults in the school. In the light of this thesis, SDT also provides clues to the structuring of activities, practitioner practice and the implementing of the ZPD.

But SDT, like both EVT and SRT, is not clear in cases where a child has not expressed an interest or a preference. It is difficult to evaluate the levels of interest shown by the child in the beginning of these accounts, especially in the cases of where the child did not choose to participate. The findings in this thesis also suggest that self-determination becomes more important in the second stage of sustaining where the child is more confident. The child needs to learn to play the game in order to know whether they like the game. Only at this second stage of sustaining can we begin to say that the child is beginning to be autonomous, find their way, and be interested/motivated.

Therefore, notions of SDT autonomy are problematic when considering a child in middle childhood whose sense of identity and values are only emerging and where levels of adult support in forming interest may well be greater than in adolescence. Similarly, adult influence in schools selecting and guiding ECA may well be of greater need for children who do not inhabit cultural worlds of parental hobby ‘habituses’ (Wheeler 2012).

However, SDT does recognise the role of competency in fuelling interest. People derive an inherent satisfaction from exercising and extending their capabilities (Brophy, 2013; White, 1959). Weiss and Williams (2004) found that children tend to be drawn toward areas where they perceive themselves to be competent and shy away from areas where they feel unsuccessful. Crane and Temple (2014) found that the two most important factors related to dropout rates in ‘organised sport’ for children and youth were (1) participants’ perceptions of their competence and (2) their enjoyment of sport. Competency and enjoyment may be co-dependent. It is this need for competence that provides the synergy for learning. If feelings of competence are enhanced, then students perceive more control over school outcomes. SDT is also relevant to my findings in acknowledging provision of structure by teachers that enhances feelings of competence in students. Competence in SDT is provided through structure. Structure may be categorised into four components of which the teacher is pivotal. SDT also supports the practice of ZPD in advocating these four requirements in which we can detect goal-oriented tasks and the role of feedback:

(1) Practitioners provide structure through clarity (giving clear, understandable, explicit, and detailed instructions and succinctly outlining forthcoming lessons).

(2) Practitioners should offer students guidance in continuing activities by monitoring their work or offering help or support when needed (Jang et al., 2010; Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

(3) Practitioners provide structure by means of support and encouragement (Belmont et al., 1992; Skinner et al., 2008), thereby making students feel that they acquire more control over school outcomes. Teachers can encourage students by communicating positive expectations regarding their schoolwork.

(4) Practitioners should provide constructive, informational feedback, thereby helping students to gain control over valued outcomes (Jang et al., 2010).



Both negative and positive feedback may enhance students' feelings of competence through the provision of structure (Kucirkova et al., 2014).

The use of feedback featured in fifteen of the stories but was especially emphasised by all the Persuade practitioners in interviews 15–20. Bear in mind that Persuade is driven by performance in debating competitions. Interviews 6,9, 10 and 12 mentioned peer mentoring, which also involved senior club members initiating new members on the rules and ways of the game. Feedback was used as a tool to guide the child/group to success in the task-oriented activities. Feedback may also be associated with acknowledging progress. Nineteen practitioners placed a tick in *Highlight achievements*, making this practice the most prevalent 'resilient move' identified in the Resilience Framework by the practitioners. Acknowledging achievement through praise helps implanting a child's sense of value and place (belonging). I suggest that: (1) praise may be particularly poignant in middle childhood to reinforce burgeoning levels of competency and (2) praise may be also particularly effective for children who have not chosen but have been chosen to participate. These children may require extra reassurance of their contribution and performance to enhance their sense of place. I also suggest that (3) praise may be significant as feedback for those children who have received little or no praise in school, thereby providing a buffer to the possible onset of learned helplessness.

Hence, SDT supports this thesis in understanding that engagement is dependent upon the child experiencing mastery. This is the importance of the ZPD – ensuring optimal progress through support from the practitioner. All twenty interviews illustrated increased competence that bolstered engagement. Improved levels of competency promote resilient outcomes of confidence, performing better than expected and the child's sense of belonging in the field. These, in turn, have may the added knock-on effects of improved levels of competency in the classroom and a sense of a child's place, worth and belonging both within the field of ECA and the larger field of school. Improved competency may be especially important for those children who had hitherto not experienced success in school.

The benefits of a good school experience may be long lasting and experiences within a child's life tend to influence the trajectory of what happens next. Therefore, embedding these good experiences at an early age would seem to be highly beneficial for it is these experiences which influence cognitive performance, self-esteem and self-efficacy (Hattie, 2012; Rutter, 1991; Smith, 2006;) and self-regulation.

Despite the lack of emphasis upon praise in helping a child understand their improvement, SDT does recognise the importance of belonging. In their review of empirical evidence on the need to belong, Baumeister and Leary (1995) propose that the need for relatedness, or, in their terms, the need to belong, has two features. First, people need frequent personal contact that is affectively positive and pleasant and free from conflict and negative affect. Secondly, people need to perceive that there is an interpersonal bond or relationship highlighted by stability, care, and continuation. In association with SDT, Waters, Cross and Shaw (2010) conclude from their study of 3,769 Australian students (12–13 years old) that ‘developmental health theories’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) provide support for the interaction between an individual and their context. This interaction between student and school shapes outcomes of development and behaviour. Regarding SDT, the authors equate student-school connectedness as dependent on the extent to which each student interacts within a school ecology to satisfy their need to feel autonomous, competent, and related. Waters and colleagues’ findings of student predictors to school connectedness included connectedness to teachers and peers, as well as peer problems, and participation in ECA (Waters et al., 2010. p.398). The need to feel autonomous links with Piagetian theory, however, the findings in this thesis suggests that autonomy, competence and belonging emerge in the second stage of sustaining and this requires a foundation based upon heteronomous support of ECA field availability and ZPD.

SDT recognises the need to belong as an ingredient in driving interest/motivation. I suggest that we can include the development of habitus in alignment to the field of ECA as a child’s sense of belonging. Therefore, in conjunction with a notion of belonging, we may add dimensions of a child learning to play the game, their emerging identity within the field, and their successful engagement to the ECA.

The role of peer mentoring in building mastery is not mentioned by proponents of EVT, SRT and SDT. Neither does EVT, SRT and SDT consider obstacles, such as home imposed timetables and values, in obstructing or permitting ECA engagement. Equally, EVT, SRT and SDT do not account for a child being interested in an activity but unable to attend and thus, their interest being unfulfilled. The importance of a sense of belonging and obstacles to participation are more significant in our fourth theory.

## 7.4 Co-Regulation Theory

There is a recognition within CRT that much of what we do is not through choice, it is shaped and governed by who and where we are (McCaslin, 2009). To this we may also add that the developmental stage also dictates the amount of individual volition and choice. In middle childhood, adult introduction to what we do is more dominant than in later stages of life. This is particularly significant in my findings. Whilst motivated behaviour is viewed by EVT and SRT as a result of choices that individuals make (Bandura, 1997; Eccles, 2005; Elliot & Dweck, 2005), choice under CRT is only one motivational dynamic. CRT recognises that the notion of choice can be misleading. This is particularly significant for those children who do not choose or are refrained from choosing. This, therefore, restricts the usefulness of choice in understanding motivation through the autonomous child. For example, the interviews pointed to decisions/choices made by adults in the triggering and stage one of sustaining, which provided the proximal processes for the child's habitus response, as identified in stage two of sustaining ECA engagement.

Nor, as has been pointed out, can we assume that all the children, especially so for those children who were invited/selected in these stories, were interested or motivated at the point of entry into the ECA field. The findings in this thesis suggest that levels of a child's interest and their values and expectancies are significantly determined or transformed by how the activity is structured. It is the practitioner practice within the ZPD that drives the triggering stage into the first sustaining stage through goal-oriented tasks. This allows the child to learn how to play the game and the child develops a habitus in alignment to the field. Without a sense of competency, the child's continued interest will be compromised.

This thesis also agrees with CRT in that it is the immersion into fields of activity that determine what we might become. It is these governed experiences and the relationships within those experiences that are key to what children do, with whom and for how long. According to CRT, the quality of these experiences and relationships determines 'emergent interaction' (McCaslin, 2009), which is the process through which an individual mediates and internalises social and cultural influences (Wertsch & Stone, 1985). The links with Bourdieu are tenable; Thomson (2014) talks of the social being embedded and embodied in agents through their immersion in fields. Therefore, it is the field that determines the habitus formation and the particular arrangement of dispositions derived from participating in a particular field (Thomson, 2014).

There is also an association between CRT with the work of Vygotsky and McCaslin. The findings and abduction stage support CRT's position that it is the cultural, social relationships that influence, challenge, shape, and guide ("co-regulate") a child's identity (McCaslin, 2004) and that this is a continuous process that emerges through participation and validation. This lends CRT to Vygotsky's perspective on the social origins of higher psychological processes (Vygotsky, 1978) and the role of activity and emergent interaction in human functioning (Wertsch & Stone, 1985)

Within CRT there is also the recognition that the essential construct in interest is the establishment of 'belonginess' (McCaslin, 2009). As social beings, humans seek a sense of belongingness which is realised through participation. There is a recognition in CRT of belongingness, through participation, as a basic human need, which embeds us in our social relationships and culture through validation. Thus, what we do and in engagement with whom informs who we might become.

Belonging is also associated with human attachment (Bowlby, 1969; Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and identity formation (Marcia, 1993; Schwartz, 2001). Ungar and colleagues (2007) identified belonging as one of eight aspects of a young person's environment that work to create processes that are associated with 'doing well' under stress. Similarly, the Resilience Framework provides a valuable template of environmental strategies that can be employed by practitioners in schools to enhance a child/young person's sense of belonging. This makes the Resilience Framework a useful tool for schools to employ for establishing resilience building field and habitus for a child facing adversity and disadvantage. The framework places an emphasis on what schools, rather than the child need to do to promote/foster resilience for a child facing adversity. Field school focussed methods (the triggering stage) can be seen in the approaches: 'Find somewhere for the child/YP to belong' 'Tap into good influences', 'Get together people the child/YP can count on' and 'Make school/ college work as well as possible'. Habitus-forming approaches of the framework (the sustaining stage) are: 'Fostering their interests' (which I suggest also involves discovering their interests), 'Develop life skills', 'Foster their talents', 'Highlight achievements', 'Keep relationships going', 'Have a laugh', 'Solving problems', 'Help a child/YP to organise her/himself' and 'Help a child/YP to know her/himself'.

A precise definition of the concept of 'belonging' has been elusive (Miller, 2006). May (2011) proposes that a definition of belonging should include a sense of ease, a sense of being not the other, and a place within which one has achieved a sense of mastery of the routines. These traits of belonging, the notion of an individual having a sense of achieving

their place within a specific context (field) resonate with the findings of this thesis. The sense of place and social bonds are inseparable from belonging. It is through interactions with others within the field that the child learns the codes of behaviour needed to gain the insider knowledge necessary to master the unwritten rules and routines of that field. Bourdieu's theory of habitus situates belonging within the structural norms and forms of capital accrued through knowing the language, rules, routines, and rituals of social networks of fields.

Whilst there is acknowledgement in SRT of the need to belong, CRT goes further and places belonging at the centre of motivation. As social beings, humans seek a sense of belongingness with and value to others that McCaslin (2009) suggests is realised through participation. What a child does and in engagement with whom informs who that child might become.

In conclusion, EVT and SRT provide some insight as to barriers to triggering ECA. This is especially so with expectations and values (EVT) and mindset (SRT) towards ECA being heavily influenced by a child's past experiences, which may lead them to not want to participate in more experiences at school. Both theories also provide clues to the autonomous child in the second stage of sustaining, whereby values, expectations and mindset, are more established from having been engaged within the field of ECA. But SDT and CRT provide a better fit to the findings of this thesis with their awareness of availability of resources and structuring of the ECA to maximise mastery, enjoyment and a sense of belonging. Whilst SDT places the most amount of emphasis on feedback, CRT takes the sense of belonging furthest in the role of interest formation and equates belonging with the child's emergent identity. I therefore suggest that CRT contains the greatest ability to explain (1) the triggering data of this thesis - through adult decisions, (2) the first stage of sustaining ZPD and (3) the resultant belonging, habitus formation, of the second stage of sustaining ECA engagement.

## **7.5 Engagement rather than Interest/Motivation**

The findings in this research point to a process of engagement rather than of interest formation in explaining the events in the twenty interviews. It is the engaging process, the dynamics between the engaging practitioner and the engaged child which will influence interest formation. This will be especially the case for children who are invited and selected rather than voluntarily chose to participate. The process of sustaining ECA engagement is composed of two stages. Similar to the triggering stage, the first stage of engagement is

equally heavily weighted towards the engager adult in structuring the ECA, that is, the practitioner practice (ZPD) in the triggering and the first stage of the activity. This indicates engagement initially being a proximal process, that is, the provision of field and the invitation of the child by an adult into the field. The first stage of sustaining was also weighted heavily towards the performance of the adult. I have identified a second stage to sustaining ECA engagement: the child's internal response, their habitus alignment to the ECA field and the ZPD. In middle childhood, we cannot assume that a child's expectancies and values are formed but rather they are emerging. For expectancies and values to develop, a child requires experiences within fields and fields require permission to access. Within the previous chapter on four interest theories, I suggest that whilst none fully capture the twenty stories, some provide more relevance and accuracy to the events. I propose that SDT and CRT provide a more accurate account of the events given their greater acknowledgement of access to resources and how choice, particularly in childhood, is shaped by adults. This point is most emphasised in CRT. The first stage of sustaining is equally best covered by SDT and CRT with their heavy focus on practitioner practice rather than individual traits of the learner, which is the emphasis in EVA and SRT. The EVA and SRT theories can be used to explain the second stage of sustaining ECA engagement where we can certainly begin to see expectations, values and self-regulation as part of the child's newly emerged habitus. This is where I believe we can begin to conceive of interest formation and the autonomous child. But EVT and SRT only provide a partial picture, whilst SDT and CRT provide a more comprehensive explanation of processes of feedback, belonging and identity. These two theories I suggest help us better appreciate the intricate dance of engagement between a teacher and a learner. I also suggest that we remember in this intricate dance of engagement that the music and steps to this dance, the path and gate to the field, policy formation, are largely chosen by adults,

Engagement informs and shapes interest. Yet within the literature on education, the terms interest, motivation and engagement are often interchanged (see Deci, 1992; Ding et al., 2013; Renninger, 2000; Renninger & Hidi, 2016).

In identifying the processes that trigger and sustain ECA engagement in middle childhood, I believe the concept of engagement, rather than interest or motivation, informs our study of the ways in which learners respond to learning environments and how interest is fashioned. Engagement, therefore, is not only a psychological state but also the process of learners' connections to the learning environment. Engagement includes socioemotional and cognitive aspects of the learning environment (see Gresali & Barab, 2011). Conceptualising

ECA engagement in this way acknowledges the frame of the experience, the access, design and expectations that are facilitated and communicated by the practitioner. Explaining the processes of ECA engagement for a child who has previously not participated make us understand what needs to be in place to provide ECA routes to success for other children in middle childhood who have yet to participate. These processes are detailed in the next chapter.

This thesis supports the idea that learners elect to sustain engagement in tasks and activities in which they feel competent and confident and avoid those in which they do not (Bandura, 1997; Crane & Temple, 2014; Weiss & Williams, 2004). Levels of competency, however, may only be established after tasks and activities are encountered. History of failure in similar or other tasks/activities may hinder an individual to indulge in the task/activity. This is borne out with these twenty success stories of ECA engagement. More significantly, these accounts also confirm that improved competency within one field of ECA may trigger spin-offs, with children voluntarily choosing to enter other fields of ECA as well as improvement in classroom performance.

Engagement, rather than interest, allows us to recognise the dynamics of process in determining an outcome. Engagement allows us to understand both the triggering and sustaining of an activity. Engagement, rather than interest, permits us to explain the processes of interest formation and the route to resilience. For engagement is determined by what resources are available within the child's world and the adult gatekeepers to these resources. In childhood, these gatekeepers are predominantly family members and adults working in schools. The crucial role of adults in forming life-long hobby interest was reported by the practitioners in their past histories. Of the 18 practitioners who said they practiced a hobby, 16 pointed to childhood as the commencement to their life-long hobby. Of these, six indicated a family member (predominantly parents) who had introduced them to their hobby, and 10 identified a teacher at Primary school (not Secondary school) as the trigger to their hobby. Three of these respondents spoke of both family and school influences and the importance of opportunities as the school they attended possessed the facilities. School and a relationship with a teacher were recurring themes. Research reveals that the principal drivers of ECA participation come from families that encourage and value structured activities beyond school hours (Metsapelto & Pulkinen, 2014; Wheeler, 2012; Wheeler & Green, 2014). Where these familial values do not exist adults in schools may provide powerful influence on ECA uptake. Middle childhood may well be the most optimal time for this adult intervention to take place.

## **7.6 Engagement and Habitus rather than Character**

Engaging a child at school in an activity at school in which they can excel has beneficial outcomes. The stories of successful ECA engagement reveal outcomes that include better self-confidence, more perseverance, and higher school attendance and academic results. Some practitioners also reported a child finding their place, value and a sense of belonging at school, through ECA engagement. This affective dimension reflects an emotional link to school and refers to students' sense of belonging to school. The affective component of school engagement has been conceptualised as school attachment and reflects the extent to which students feel close to people at their school, feel a part of their school, and are happy to be at their school and perceive an 'identification with school' (Voelkl, 1997).

The implications of these findings suggest that what is required for each child is to discover an avenue towards building competencies within the school context. It is ECA engagement that produces resilient outcomes, that is, a child performing much better than before. This resilient outcome applies for the pupil but also for the school by expanding the school's knowledge of how resilient routes are built. These ECA avenues are worth exploring for children who struggle to be successful in the classroom. Pupil engagement, rather than pupil character, places the focus on the school and pedagogic experiences.

So, where does this leave character formation as a school intervention? This is an important question given the importance of character formation in educational recommendations and policy. Since its conception in 2011, the EEF, in identifying promising educational innovations that address the needs of disadvantaged children in primary and secondary schools in England, has identified pupil 'self-regulation' and 'character building' as the key to bridging the imbalance between the life outcomes of rich and poor students.

This focus on character was confirmed further on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2018 with the EEF publishing a report entitled '15 Key lessons learned in first six years' in which 'character' formation in children and young people was recognised as 'a major focus of work for the EEF.' However, '...whilst the report recognises essential life skills or 'character' as important in determining life chances... Much is less known about how these skills can be developed...' (The Education Endowment Foundation, 2018b, p.18)

Certainly, the lessons from the twenty interviews of successful ECA engagement is that none of them specifically sought to install character. The goal was to improve the child's



performance in the activity and the ECAs were structured upon goal-oriented tasks based upon the activity. The children in these stories present an emerging identity evolving through their performance by learning to improve their competencies in the activity. This performance within the ECA field shapes the child's habitus through a process of ZPD – feedback/improved competency/mastery (improved competency is interlinked with enjoyment/fun) acknowledgement through praise. Schools should concentrate upon the triggering and the first stage sustaining processes identified in this research. If schools can provide these two platforms, then they are providing a learning environment that will nurture the growth of an emergent child's habitus in alignment with the field. This emergent habitus certainly contains character traits. But character is restrictive and does not tell the whole habitus story of ECA engagement.

Habitus allows us to look at the power of place and belonging upon a child's identity. Place and belonging, within a child's ecology, shape a child's response and their character. This makes the conditions for habitus formation much more transformative than mere character, for habitus informs character. Some children are required and are successful in making greater habitus adjustments between fields than their peers. Children who successfully navigate these 'disjunctures' (Ingram, 2011) or 'counter trajectory' (Popora & Shumar, 2010) of competing fields, exhibit what I call a *resilient habitus*. A resilient habitus refers to the ability to move between contrasting fields. The greater the disparity or divergence of the fields and the ease to which adaptation to these contrasting fields is achieved is a measure of one's resilient habitus. We often talk of someone being a social chameleon, that is, they are happy and socially functioning in various social spheres. We call this skill the social chameleon effect – a nonconscious mimicry of the postures, mannerisms, facial expressions, discourse of different settings, to the extent that one's behaviour passively and unintentionally changes to match that of the current social environment (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999) Some people are more adept at this social adaptation. Others, 'settled into their ways' struggle or resist to embrace differing milieus. Lakin, Jefferis, Cheng, and Chartrand (2003) suggest that mimicry has played an important role in human evolution. Initially, mimicry may have had a survival role by helping humans communicate. The authors however propose that the purpose of mimicry has now evolved to serve as a social function to increase affiliation, which serves to foster relationships with others.

Mimicry is learned in our early years and research suggests that our greatest mimicry powers exist when we are young (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010; Vygotsky, 1962). This is illustrated by language acquisition; 'If we learn a second language in childhood, we learn to

speak it fluently and without a ‘foreign accent’; if we learn in adulthood, it is very unlikely that we will attain a native accent.’ (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011 p.74) Further research on mimicry identifies that children possess an outstanding ability to acquire a new accent (Tagliamonte & Molfenter, 2007) Furthermore, an internet survey of 750,000 respondents (Scientific American, 2018) showed that learning a second language is best before the age of 18 and you want to achieve the grammatical fluency of a native speaker it was best to start by the age of 10. This suggests that an optimal or most advantageous level of elasticity or adaptability to environmental stimuli converges around middle childhood.

This might also point to middle childhood being a prime period to develop social chameleon skills. There has been a fair amount of research into how people deal with competing fields. Most of this research has focussed on the difficulties or constraints of moving between fields. Bourdieu spoke of a habitus “divided against itself” (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 511). Ingram (2011) talks of a 'habitus tug' whereby tastes, practices and dispositions are competing for supremacy, resulting in the individual being tugged in various directions by different fields. Reay (2002, p.222) writes of an educationally successful working class boy moving between fields as exhibiting a ‘great deal of emotion work’.

I propose that a new term of *resilient habitus* allows us to look, not at shifting back and forth between misaligned fields, but how people can create their own differently structured space that is neither one place nor the other – not a compromised space between competing worlds – but their own space of new cultural possibilities. I also suggest that middle childhood is an excellent developmental period in which to build a resilient habitus. However, as the findings of ECA engagement indicate, this route is not one that all children will voluntarily follow. Many children, especially those most disadvantaged and facing adversity for whom access to experiences such as ECA are the most limited, will require selection and barriers to participation removed. Secondly the findings indicate that success measured by competency improvement is a key theme to retaining their participation in fields from which a (resilient) habitus may be formed. As Reay (2004) acknowledges the relation between habitus and field operates in two ways. On one side, it is a relation of conditioning: the field structures the habitus, which is the product of the embodiment of the field. But habitus also contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense or with value, in which it is worth investing one's energy, for which levels of perceived competency is a predominant factor in determining the extent and vigour of our continued investment (Bourdieu, in Wacquant, 1989, p. 44).

It is important to understand what pedagogical experiences can foster a resilient habitus. Experiencing success through ECA may well be a potent route. Whilst these children may not demonstrate a growth mindset, these children nevertheless demonstrate more substantial levels of adaptation and resilience than those children whose field habituses preside closer together. Hence, children who face and achieve greater habitus trajectories in their ecologies demonstrate a resilient habitus.

## **7.7 ECA. A Route to Resilience**

From the twenty practitioner interviews, 19 considered the child to be more resilient after at least six months ECA engagement. However, these stories are of ECA success. They were handpicked and accounted for by the practitioner, not the child or parents/carers. These accounts can be considered as ideal types and they shed valuable insight into how ECA engagement is triggered and sustained for a FSM child in middle childhood and whether this engagement can be considered to build resilience for that child. The claims that can be made from the findings cannot be causal nor, from a small number of twenty, be considered generalisable. What I believe this thesis can proclaim from the findings is that ECA engagement through the themes and subsequent theoretical explanation has a *tendency* to build resilience. If we know what underlies a certain course of events we can also intervene or direct future courses of events and make them correspond better with good intentions and purposes. An understanding of what has a tendency to work in an open system, such as a primary school, can potentially enable other schools and interventions to replicate these variables to predict a tendency towards future successful outcomes.

Improved resilience is associated in eight interviews with increased levels of confidence (interviews 1,3,5,7,8,9,12, & 13). We can see repercussions of this with six of the children subsequently joining other ECA's (interviews 1,2,5,10,12, & 13). Resilience through ECA is also improved perseverance as identified in seven interviews (2,6, 15,16,17,18, & 19). A better attitude to learning (interviews 11, 12, & 17) equally correspond to six practitioners reporting better academic performance (interviews 2, 6, 11,12,13, & 17).

My thesis does not celebrate stories of extra-ordinary talent. It is a collection of stories of FSM children in Key Stage 2 finding routes to success at school despite adversity through engaging within a field of ECA. These stories show that aptitudes are often formed not by natural talent or character teaching but from discovering a route to success in which a

child can excel in ways hitherto not experienced. These accounts illuminate both adversity from socio-economic factors and also cognitive and physical impairment and how sustained engagement in ECA enabled these children to experience success and thereby increase their confidence and self-esteem. The twenty stories illustrated building competencies and achievement from different levels, often from low beginnings. Children facing barriers to development whether through the effects of poverty or cognitive and physical impairment may be particularly responsive to domains in which they improve their abilities. These positive experiences may well foster impressive leaps in abilities and accompanied feelings of self-worth and accomplishment which may filter into other domains. It is finding the fit between the child and the activity and then ensuring progress - and the linked emotions of enjoyment that come with accomplishment and achievement - that is key in this process. This is not a study of building champions who come first in the race and break records. Rather, they demonstrate remarkable improvement from various levels of entry. Often the greatest levels of improvement were demonstrated by children with the lowest levels of competency at the triggering stage.

The ECA route has resilient outcomes of a child performing better than before. Resilience outcomes of this route can be traced through building competencies, perseverance and confidence. From these results, further resilient spin-offs may radiate, such as improved academic performance and attitude to work. This thesis also strongly highlights the importance of adults, principally at home or at school, who steer children towards interests and aptitudes. It is adults who construct and guide children through this resilient building route. Children develop within the context of many systems, including families, peer groups, schools, and communities. Bronfenbrenner (1979) recognised that the resilience of each of these interrelated systems had to be assessed when considering the resilience of individuals.

This research also underlines the importance for those children who experience adversity in their lives to experience havens of success. If success is experienced at school, then this may reinforce the bond between the child and their school. Success in one field may even lead to success in other fields. It may well be that reducing the number of problem areas in a child's life, even by one, may have a disproportionate and decisive impact. This seems to indicate that a small change within a child's profile or functioning in school may have an important wider ripple effect generating momentum possibly for a virtuous spiral of change and development. ECA provides a variety of additional routes by which a child can experience success in school.

The quality of practitioner/child relationship afforded through the dynamics of ECA accounted in the twenty interviews supports earlier research, which identified that the quality of the student–teacher relationships may be particularly important for at-risk students (Decker, Dona & Christenson, 2007; Rudasill & Rimm-Kaufman, 2009). Positive student–teacher relationships may serve as a protective process to promote resilient outcomes for at-risk, vulnerable students (Pianta et al. 1995; Gregory, Allen, Mikami, Hafen & Pianta, 2014). It is these relationships that help bridge the often-considerable gap between the habituses enacted outside school with those adopted/required at school. Habitus, rather than character, also allows us to understand notions of place, the emergence of belonging and where and how a child believes they fit in. Habitus formation through ECA routes allows us to build resilient outcomes for children facing disadvantage and adversity.

Confidence was also considered a resilient outcome on the ECA route. The majority of practitioners alluded to a lack of confidence in their child before ECA engagement. The practitioners subsequently associated increased resilience levels with the child’s enhanced confidence through ECA. This would support the earlier findings of Findlay and Coplan (2008) who examined the role of organised sport participation as a moderator between shyness and psychosocial maladjustment in middle childhood. Findlay and Coplan (2008) concluded that sport participation may provide shy children with mastery experiences that contribute to fostering self-esteem. For shy children, this may be particularly important considering their high degree of anxiety in social situations. Thus, shy children benefit from repeated success in various domains to buffer the typically negative effect of shyness on self-esteem.

These findings resonate with resilience research. According to Rutter (1990), the two types of experience that seem most important in influencing self-esteem are (a) secure and harmonious love relationships and (b) success in accomplishing tasks that are identified by individuals as central to their own interests. Schools and ECA provide a dynamic for forming relationships and experiencing success (Daly & Gilligan, 2013; Gilligan, 2000). ECA in this thesis shares certain features that perhaps distinguish itself from many of the other fields within the child’s ecology. For example, the ECA’s facilitated high-quality peer interactions and the development of prosocial friendships (Fredricks & Simpkins, 2012; Simpkins, Fredricks & Eccles, 2012). The twenty ECA stories would appear to lend themselves well to what Willis and colleagues (2017) call ‘meaningful participation experiences’ (p.10) including: the opportunity to participate, experiencing success, belonging, friendships, role models, having an identity.

These ‘meaningful participation experiences’ (Willis et al. 2017, pp.7-8) align with the specific approaches most identified by the practitioners in the Resilience Framework: ‘highlight achievements’ (19 ticks), ‘make friends’ (17 ticks), ‘find somewhere for the child to belong’ (13 ticks), and ‘help the child to know her/himself’ (10 ticks).

What practitioners do and their relationships with children, the experiences they structure for children, are important in the construct of a child’s route to resilience. Resilience can be considered as an emergent outcome of sustained engagement in ECAs, which depend on dynamic and relational interaction between pupil and practitioner. In this process the practitioner is key to enabling access to ECA and providing a range of enjoyable experiences that build a sense of belonging, competence and confidence that the pupil may not otherwise access. This can have a positive impact on social emotional development and may transfer to academic outcomes. This results in a child doing better than expected despite existing adversity.

## **7.8 Resilience and Practitioner Practice**

From these twenty accounts, we can point towards practitioner practice as an integral construction of the route to a child performing better than before. Practitioner practice functions directly as promotive and protective factors in the lives of children facing adversity and disadvantage by nurturing the competency and resilience of each child. Practitioners, therefore, have the potential to be pivotal in driving proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006) within a child’s ecology, that is, powerful protective school relationships (Galassi, Griffin & Akos, 2008; Masten, 2006). The findings also point to secure attachments in school from which the child with a reliable ‘secure base’ may explore the wider world (Bowlby, 1988). These secure and safe attachments nevertheless require access to fields of experience for this exploration to take place. Research has indicated that children who have negative relationships with their teachers are more likely to have problems related to school engagement and academic achievement (Baker 2006; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Stipek & Miles, 2008). Student–teacher relationship quality may be particularly important for at-risk students (Liew, Chen & Hughes, 2010; Rudasill & Rimm-Kaufman, 2009). Negative school experiences for these pupils reinforces expectations of experiencing negative experiences in

all sectors of their life. The significance of external context to school performance was highlighted in two summing up phrases from the practitioners:

‘Mental health can be a barrier in terms of parental engagement and support’ (Interview 11).

‘What goes on the night before and morning affects this dramatically’ (Interview 2).

Resilient outcomes from these accounts lends support to evidence from a longitudinal study in Hawaii, which underlined the benefit of relations with teachers and other interested adults for young people doing well despite stressful home circumstances (Gilligan, 2000).

Through their actions practitioners can convey a sense of caring, respect, and appreciation that may lead to a child’s greater engagement in school. This engagement and subsequent improvement in attitude to learning (interview 11, 12, 17), levels of perseverance (interview 2, 6, 16, 17, 18, 19) and academic improvement (interview 2, 6, 11, 12, 13, 17) also supports practitioner social support with a range of indicators of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Wang & Eccles, 2012; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). The findings also support Dotterer and Lowe (2011) and Hughes (2012) who linked the quality of social relationships between staff in school and 11-year-olds as significant predictors with levels of school engagement of academic achievement. These factors were found to be especially important for academically at-risk students across key microsystems, such as home and school.

However, I would suggest that whilst my findings indicate support for previous research that a strong bond with a practitioner in school may be more important in enhancing engagement for children with previous achievement difficulties, this in itself is not transformative without a method of instruction attached to this strong bond. The method of instruction through the practitioner practice allows the positive bond between the adult and the child to move and develop. My findings point to child development occurring as result of active participation in progressively complex, reciprocal interactions with persons (both adults and other children). This is what I call the ZPD route to competency building. The process of this ZPD route to competency building is developing mastery through goal-oriented activity, practitioner and peer feedback (thus incorporating peer mentoring) and collaborative group learning can reverse or mitigate the child’s past cumulative experiences of failure and help construct a new learning trajectory. The significance of practitioner practice, which is Stage one of sustaining ECA engagement, was reiterated by nine practitioners when summing up their account of ECA engagement with phrases pointing

towards the process rather than the outcome (see section 5.8 Practitioners' One-Line Summative Phrase).

This ZPD route to mastery influences the child's level of engagement and their habitus alignment with the field of the ECA. With habitus formation, the child's response to the pedagogical experiences of the field, we can begin to understand notions of belonging, the child's connectedness with the school where the ECA is performed. Three of the 14 practitioners' summing-up phrases indicated the child's internal response, which is the second stage of ECA engagement:

'Understanding your identity' (Interview 17)

'Flexibility of thought – adapting and coping with change, transitions' (Interview 8)

'Self-belief' (Interview 10)

The application of abductive analysis has allowed me to understand a child's resilience as a construct of relations and practice and to 'shift inequality theorising beyond the individual towards deeper, detailed social understandings of transformation and change' (Aranda & Hart, 2015). This too, provides implications for a child's agency and change away from psychological explanations of character or mindset to socio-ecological solutions of field, engagement, competency and habitus.

We can conceive of resilience being a social practice or action, rather than an individual trait. Resilience is something that may be seen to emerge initially from the exterior, for example, the school and/or the practitioner, converging with the individual child/pupil and thereby changing, or possibly transforming, both the child and the school/practitioner if the school can take a success story and embed this experience into further routes for other children.

There are important implications arising from this approach to our understandings of the processes of triggering and sustaining ECA engagement in childhood. Better understandings of the external contexts and mechanisms of engagement have crucial implications for pedagogical interventions and programs. This requires us to think retrospectively and prospectively about what works, for whom and when? This places the school as a key mechanism to generate resilience processes and practices which may influence a child's resilient dispositions.



## 7.9 Frustrations

The findings indicate the provision of ECA and practitioner practice within ECA as a route to resilient outcomes for the child. However, the practitioners pointed to frustrations and hindrances that adversely affected the construction of this route.

Interviewee 1 expressed this frustration as an inability of policy makers to see the link between the arts and academic progress. This non-recognition of policy makers was borne out in a BBC report (2018) in which 90% of the 1200 state schools contacted said that they had cut back on lesson time, staff or facilities in at least one creative arts subject. The BBC reported a year earlier that the status of music in secondary schools was facing extinction (BBC, 2017). The BBC reported that music was being squeezed out of the curriculum because of pressure on pupils to take subjects included in the EBacc school league tables. Introduced in 2010, the EBacc subjects are: English language and literature, maths, the sciences, geography or history, a language.

‘Secondary schools are measured on the number of pupils that take GCSEs in these core subjects.’ (Gov.Uk, 2019a).

The UK government’s target at the time of this report was to have 75% of pupils studying the EBacc subject combination at GCSE by 2022, and 90% by 2025.

The absence of any performing arts at EBacc GCSE is in contrast to the state of the arts sector in the British economy. The Guardian (2019) points to this discrepancy between school priority and economic value. Performing arts are part of the fastest growing sector of the economy, which contributed more than £100bn in 2017, and yet in British state schools they are ‘facing an existential threat.’ Between the years 2010 and 2018, the number of pupils taking A level dance fell by 42%, drama fell by 33% and music fell by 38% (The Guardian, 2019b).

A Persuade mentor (Interviewee 17) was frustrated, as summed up in this quote: ‘I can see education is failing them’. This mentor could see the benefit of that the debating club was having on his child but regretted that only one hour a week was afforded to this activity. Similarly, another Persuade mentor (Interviewee 20) regretted having just an hour a week with her group, as the first 15 minutes of each session was spent trying to get the group back to where they were the week before.

Frustration was also expressed in the reduction in funding to employ support staff for ECA. The Independent (2018) reported that four out of five headteachers have been forced to cut back on teaching assistants due to lack of funds. Half of headteachers questioned said that they had reduced non-education support to balance their budgets. Headteachers accepted that their forced cuts to teaching assistants and other support services headteachers will ‘damage the education of the most vulnerable learners and will lead to a rise in behavioural difficulties in the classroom’ (The Independent, 2018). Geoff Barton, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders admitted that the cuts to staffing levels would lead to less curriculum activities and be most damaging to children who require extra support and to those children whose parents cannot afford supplementary activities outside of school. This sentiment of a general decline in the choice of ECA at school was also echoed by a practitioner (interviewee 3). The Guardian (2015) reported a survey of teachers, funded by the Scout Association, which found that nearly 90% of teachers blamed lack of time and focus on the core curriculum for a decline in their provision of ECA.

Interviewee 9 spoke of all ‘all the paperwork, all the policy-following, all this ticking boxes’ that stopped her from being the type of teacher she had joined the profession to be. One remedy would be to extend the school day. The EEF toolkit evaluates the intervention of Extending the School Day at (+2), affording pupils two additional months’ progress per year from extended school time ‘and in particular through the targeted after school programmes. There is some evidence that disadvantaged pupils benefit more, making closer to three months’ additional progress.’ However, the EEF equates Extending the School Day (+2) with Sports Participation (+2) and Arts Participation (+2), placing the extension of the school day by offering sports and arts activities joint 21<sup>st</sup> out of the 34 interventions judged to improve the outcomes of poorer, disadvantaged pupils. One effect of extending the school day is fatigue. For example, Sakac, Maric and Lipovac (2017) state that, despite the multiple benefits accorded to ECA participation, one negative effect is pupil fatigue as most ECA takes place after school. However, this report of pupil fatigue is counterbalanced by interviewee 9 reporting the large number of children wanting to join her club at the end of the school day. It is interesting to compare pupil fatigue at the end of the school day with interviewee 9’s frustration that she didn’t have help additional help to run her club given the number of children that wanted to take part. Interviewee 9 took on the extra numbers of children despite saying, ‘we couldn’t afford to have another member of staff stay later’. A lack of staff helping at the end of the day may indicate staff fatigue and motivation, as well as

lack of staff through funding cuts. Interviewee 2 claimed that the last thing most practitioners wanted to do at the end of the school day was to stay on another hour and run a club.

The Times Educational Supplement (2019b) reported concerns of a secondary school teacher that teachers who chose not to add more to your working day were increasingly judged as ‘failing’ to provide an extracurricular club or ‘refusing’ to provide additional enrichment. Judging teacher success by time on site and the number of ‘extras’ they offer was not fair or an accurate way of measuring a teacher’s success. Those teachers who were single or did not have children were deemed to come under harsher scrutiny, as did postgraduate students, and newly-qualified teachers. There abounded the notion that unless these teachers provided extracurricular enrichment for their students, they were not committed or enthusiastic about the job.

A survey report by the National Education Union (2018) on teacher workload in schools and academies recorded the views of 8,173 teachers on their workload, as expressed via a NEU survey conducted in late 2017. The report provides evidence of the extent and causes of the drastic recruitment and retention problems many schools and academies are experiencing. In the report, 81% of the respondents said they had considered leaving teaching in the last year because of the workload. Over 80% of teachers claimed they were now teaching more hours than in 2016.

The most frequently cited workload drivers were as follows:

- ‘74% Pressure to increase pupil test scores/exam grades
- 52% Changes to curriculum/ assessment/exams
- 46% Ofsted, mock inspections, other inspections
- 41% Lack of money and resources in school
- 33% Reduction of Support Staff
- 33% Demands from school leaders/ governors
- 27% Increasing class sizes
- 25% Changes to systems and structures
- 21% Expectation to teach outside of timetable (for example, lunchtime, holiday or after school classes)
- 18% Lack of consultation with staff in the workplace
- 17% Parental expectations (for example, reports, parents meetings, regular emails)
- 10% Lack of support from outside agencies
- 8% Having to teach outside their specialism

6% Reduction in funding for extra-curricular activities, meaning the teacher is asked to run more clubs’

(National Education Union, 2018)

Whereas interviewee 2 spoke of a reluctance of staff to stay on at school and run or help run an after-school club, none of the practitioners spoke of their own fatigue. This does not mean they were not tired; there may have been a general reluctance to admit fatigue, or not to place personal fatigue sufficiently up the hierarchy of perceived hindrances and frustrations to mention. I suggest that fatigue was certainly an issue, in league with the National Education Union (2018) findings and the absence of mentioning personal fatigue is testament to these practitioners’ resilience. Another buffer to practitioner fatigue was positive teaching experiences through ECA engagement. Moran (2017) reported that there has been a limited amount of research on the impact of ECA supervision on job satisfaction. One study examined teacher job satisfaction among 2569 elementary and middle school teachers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). The researchers discovered that ‘value consonance and positive social relations predicted feeling of belonging’ (p. 1029). Skaalvik and Skaalvik discovered that if teachers have a sense of belonging, they seemed to stay in the profession. Being involved with ECAs was considered a means for teachers to foster a sense of belonging and improving job satisfaction. This is fascinating since it suggests that practitioners of ECA may well need and importantly receive a route to belonging to their school in the same way that was reported for the children who featured in this thesis.

Likewise, Thompson (2013) in the U.S.A. investigated the link between teacher job satisfaction and involvement in ECAs through 63 responses across two schools. The author found that ‘that factors related to a teacher’s experience of relationships and personal interest/growth opportunities were correlated with levels of satisfaction specific to extracurricular involvement’ (p. 3). Thompson concluded that ‘ECA provided opportunities for teachers to experience a strong sense of community, student growth, their own personal growth, and participation in an activity of personal interest’ (p. 13). Involvement in areas of personal interests was found also found to improve teacher satisfaction levels and, therefore, as Thompson suggests, a way of retaining teachers. Thompson also identified camaraderie as being an important aspect to job satisfaction and concluded that ECA creates a stronger sense of bonding and ‘teachers both witness bonding among students and experience this bonding themselves’ (p. 15). ECAs are often optional and voluntary, and it is ‘possible that a student is apt to feel a similar sense of belonging to the teacher who has personally invested to a great

extent' (p. 15). Thompson (2013) posits two interesting hypotheses: (1) those teachers who encounter a student not only in the classroom but also through an ECA 'are more likely to develop a closer connection with this student'; and (2) teachers who experience success in their job and who witness and encourage student growth and success have a high level of satisfaction' (Thompson, 2013, p. 21). With an increased structure and loss of creativity and freedom in classrooms due to standardised testing and school league tables for academic results in academic subjects, ECA was seen as a type of pressure release or welcome source of teaching satisfaction (Thompson, 2013, p. 22).

Certainly, all the twenty practitioners in this thesis spoke enthusiastically about their role of ECA facilitators. There was a general delight expressed in telling their account of successful ECA engagement. The practitioner's general ability, as shown in **Chapter 5**, to present, without prior notification, a timeline with little difficulty in recollecting events and key moments points to these accounts being prominent and personally meaningful. It may well be that ECA provides positive teaching moments for practitioners in ways and intensity not experienced in the classroom. This makes participation in ECA for these practitioners worthwhile, even compensatory for the fatigue, the long hours and going the extra mile. This raises interesting questions for the role of ECA in staff morale. Steeves (2014) investigated a group of teachers in Canada to find out the effect of extracurricular activity duties and reported job satisfaction. Steeves (2014) was interested in exploring differences in job satisfaction in teachers who were involved with commitments in different types of extracurricular activities, such as sports, fine arts, and academics. In this study, teachers filled out survey to find out extracurricular activity commitments of the participants. Steeves found that 'there is a correlation between increased job satisfaction in teachers who report increased involvement in extracurricular duties that involved students' (p. 3). Steeves (2014) suggests an area of future research could, 'if a teacher with reported low job satisfaction got involved with extracurricular duties for a school year to see if that would then help to increase their job satisfaction' (p. 4).

The resilience of adults who work in schools is of course important given that these individuals often play a central role as protective adults or brokers of resources in the lives of high-risk children. Through the analysis of the practitioner's frustrations and perceived hindrances I have come to understand that ECA may also provide a route to resilience for the practitioner as well as the child. The combination of teaching an activity you like, the added bonding between teacher and student that ECA affords, the eureka moments of experiencing success that ECA provides away from paperwork and box ticking, provides job satisfaction

and compensates for the hindrances and frustrations. This resilient outcome for the practitioner is an emergent explanation of the findings and, therefore, warrants my definition of resilience in this thesis to incorporate both the child and practitioner performing better through ECA engagement. Steeves' (2014) suggestion for future research as to whether teachers with a reported low job satisfaction were to be involved in extracurricular duties would their job satisfaction increase, I am left wondering whether the twenty practitioners in this thesis were denied their ECA would they be less satisfied.

## **7.10 Mapping the EEF Toolkit onto the Findings**

Before I place the EEF toolkit upon the findings, I want to briefly revisit the context in which the EEF toolkit stands and, therefore, with an understanding of the purpose of the toolkit to evaluate its effectiveness of clarifying and predicting the accounts of ECA engagement highlighted in this thesis. In the light of character formation and the search for school interventions to teach character, we should not forget that, within the eight years since the introduction of the pupil premium (an attempt to bridge the UK's educational attainment gap between the poorest and richest pupils), the outcomes for poorer students have not improved. In July 2018, the Education Policy Institute published their annual report in which the chapter headings provide a stark synopsis of the findings: Overall, there was little change in the disadvantage gap (p.9), Based on current trends, the gap at the end of secondary school would take over 100 years to close (p.11) and the gap for persistently disadvantaged pupils has remained broadly unchanged since 2011 (p.13).

The EEF aims to raise the attainment of children facing disadvantage by:

- Identifying promising educational innovations that address the needs of disadvantaged children in primary and secondary schools in England.
- Evaluating these innovations to extend and secure the evidence on what works and can be made to work at scale.
- Encouraging schools, government, charities, and others to apply evidence and adopt innovations found to be effective.

(The Sutton Trust, 2017b)

In 2015, the EEF produced a 'toolkit' for schools compiled with the help of grant funding to support promising approaches to *character building* to allow poorer pupils to

emerge from education better equipped to ‘thrive in modern Britain’. The tool kit lists thirty-four interventions, each of which is given a numerical score. The rating system is judged on how many months advancement in academic progress a student is likely to gain from participating for a year within each intervention.

In the first stage of sustaining ECA engagement, I identified four key themes in the interviews that may be directly linked to four interventions in the toolkit. For example, encouragement and instruction from peers in the ECA were considered fundamental in sustaining the child’s engagement. As the child developed in the ECA, so their role transformed from being initiated to initiating new members. We can equate these to the toolkits ‘Collaborative Learning’ (+5) and ‘Peer Mentoring’ (+5), which estimate five months academic gain from participating for a year in the intervention. Similarly, feedback was cited heavily by the practitioners. This correlates to ‘Feedback’ (+8) in the toolkit, which is the highest scoring intervention in the toolkit, estimating 8 months academic gain. Increasing competency levels was found to be integral to sustaining and linked to corresponding levels of fun/enjoyment experienced by the child, which corresponds to the toolkits ‘Mastery’ (+5). In the second stage of sustaining I identify habitus formation. There are associations here with the toolkits ‘Metacognition and Self-Regulation’ (+7). This is the toolkit’s second highest intervention. This is significant because ‘Metacognition and Self-Regulation’ is the closest of all the thirty-four interventions in the toolkit to *character*. Existing in the toolkit as an intervention ‘Metacognition and Self-Regulation’ is considered an intervention on its own right, despite the EEF acknowledging in 2018 that little was known as to how character can be taught.

So, using the EEF toolkit as a lens in which to view my findings revealed the importance of feedback, peer mentoring, collaborative learning and mastery. These interventions, I believe, can be placed in the first stage of sustaining engagement and, therefore, may be considered components of ZPD. I consider that ‘metacognition and self-regulation’ may be placed in the second stage of engagement and this may be equated to habitus formation. However, I believe that metacognition and self-regulation as a stand-alone intervention is highly problematic, as indeed feedback, peer mentoring, collaborative learning and mastery cannot exist alone, but must be incorporated into a more complex intervention which embraces each of these high scoring EEF interventions. This is where I believe problems arise in the debate as to whether and how traits such as character, mindset, ‘metacognition and self-regulation’ can be taught.

I believe the findings from twenty interviews of successful ECA engagement, and the abduction of the process of this successful engagement, indicates that schools should concentrate less on character formation and more on providing routes to success. ECA provides a rich vein of routes from which a child may experience success with resilient outcomes of achieving much better than before the ECA intervention. The findings also suggest that by concentrating upon improving competencies, from which peer mentoring, collaborative learning, goal-oriented tasks and feedback are integral, the child's habitus transforms, that is, an emergent identity and a sense belonging and place. Within this habitus we might locate, or wish to call, character or metacognitive and self-regulation changes. Mapping the toolkit onto the findings suggests that 'Metacognition and Self-Regulation' becomes a resilient outcome for the child after sustained ECA engagement. It is not in itself an intervention. The intervention was ECA.

This indicates that the toolkit is fragmented and difficult to implement by splintering thirty-four interventions. In its current format it is unwieldy and difficult for schools to apply. How might a school head decide to budget pupil premium funding on high scoring interventions such as (1) metacognition and self-regulation, (2) feedback, (3) collaborative learning, (4) peer mentoring, (5) mastery? There is too much of a broken puzzle that fragments the vision. The EEF should concentrate upon picking up the pieces and presenting a clearer picture to schools by indicating which interventions might combine several of these pieces into one design. My thesis indicates that ECA engagement, as represented in the toolkit as Sports Participation (+2) and Arts Participation (+2), is undervalued. Peer mentoring, collaborative learning, feedback and mastery with metacognition and self-regulation outcomes are all incorporated into ECA. However, the role of non-classroom experiences and praise, highlighted in this thesis as important drivers of sustaining engagement, do not feature in the toolkit. I suggest that the findings of 20 accounts of successful ECA engagement point towards a uniqueness of the ECA experience to develop a child's resilience. The theme of Non-classroom Experiences affording what practitioners claimed as a chance to strengthen bonds between them and the child is not considered by the toolkit. I suggest that the EEF analyse dynamics of group or team goal oriented/competition driven activities, as well as the dynamics of "fun" – what makes tasks enjoyable. My findings point towards a sense of progress, achievement and experiencing increasing levels of competency are important in the implementing fun. Fun however is serious. It requires the importance of attention, structuring tasks to be manageable, an attention to relative progress – each child has a different baseline of ability – and the important ingredient of praise. In



contrast to my main criticism of the Toolkit being too fragmented rendering it difficult to implement, I suggest that the Tool Kit's highest scoring intervention of Feedback is too vague and requires further analysis for what works and for who. I would argue that effective feedback, is emergent and constantly changing in response to experience. Feedback to an adolescent will look different to that of a child in middle childhood. Feedback to a child in middle childhood who has been in an ECA for at least six months will differ to that of a new member. The effectiveness of praise from an adult may well be more potent in childhood than adolescence. Praise and reminding/informing a child of their progress was deemed a vital ingredient in sustaining the child's ECA engagement.

The findings point to a distinctiveness of ECA. that would be beneficial to incorporate into the curriculum. In chapter 8 I will consider how the distinctive benefits of ECA may be incorporated into the curriculum.

## **7.11 An Original Contribution to Knowledge**

This thesis has sought to illuminate upon the processes that trigger and sustain ECA engagement for a child in middle childhood experiencing adversity. Existing literature indicates the potential benefits of children and young people participating in organised activities. We know that this participation may have additional benefits for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. We also know that participation levels in ECA decreases in adolescence and a child transitioning to secondary school who has never participated in ECA probably never will. Early experience of successful ECA would appear to be significant in securing an ECA trajectory for a pupil. With middle childhood being a developmental period in which we begin to recognise and judge our competencies vis a vis our peers, it is important for a child to find an activity/ domain in which they experience success.

This thesis has shown a significant indication that participation for a child in ECA is not automatic. Many children do not participate not through lack of interest but through constraints such as not being able to stay on after school, or shyness, lack of confidence. Many children who would benefit do not chose to take part. The thesis has shown the significance of an adult inviting/selecting a child to take part. I suggest that this adult invitation is still potent in middle childhood but probably declines significantly in adolescence. Invitation/selection by a member of staff may have considerable powers of

connecting with that child. But this initial triggering is not enough to guarantee the child's sustained participation.

The results of the study indicated two stages of sustaining ECA engagement. The first stage, like the triggering stage of the practitioner inviting/selecting the child, is practitioner led. This first sustaining stage requires careful structuring of the activity. It is important that the newly invited/selected child enjoys the ECA. The thesis found that enjoyment/fun are bound up with the child experiencing an increase in competency. It is important that the child understands and acknowledges their progress. The notion of relative achievement – where a child is currently situated and the level that they can potentially achieve through guidance is important. This progress is achieved through manageable tasks whereby the child is neither overwhelmed by difficulty nor bored by the mundaneness of the task. What appears to be crucial is that the child makes progress and that this progress is highlighted. To this end the power of feedback in this thesis in fostering progress is equated not only with practitioner guidance and praise but also guidance and praise by other children in the ECA. Praise from an adult may be particularly encouraging in middle childhood. The role of competition was found to be significant in fostering sustained ECA engagement. Experiencing increasing progress and competency may be especially significant in contexts driven by competitions and projects. These contexts make an individual's performance more relevant and valuable. The sense of a child making progress and contributing to the group's performance in a competition or project was found to be fundamental in forging that child's bond and value to the ECA.

The second stage of sustaining I have identified as the child's response to triggering and the first stage of ECA sustainment. This second stage of sustaining completes the process of engagement. Engagement has been a key notion in the route to resilience. From the practitioner led triggering and first stage of sustaining, the practitioner takes the role of engaging the child. The child's response – their habitus adaptation in alignment to the ECA – signifies the emergent engagement of the child in response to the triggering and the first stage of ECA engagement. Engagement rather than participation or interest illuminates the enabling role of the practitioner and the child's embodiment of these practices. Engagement clarifies the dynamic and relational interaction between the child, the practitioner and the other children in the ECA.

What practitioners do and their relationships with children, the experiences they structure for children, are important in the construct of a child's route to resilience. Positive experiences of increased competencies in activities do not happen by chance but require

structuring. In childhood this structuring of these positive experiences requires adults. Resilience is a dynamic process between child and environment, the outcome cannot be analysed without an understanding of the journey. We cannot condense or abbreviate resilience to that of an outcome. It must be understood holistically as an interplay between journey and the destination. Resilience can be considered as an emergent outcome of sustained engagement in ECAs, which depend on dynamic and relational interaction between pupil and practitioner. In this process the practitioner is key to enabling access to ECA and providing a range of enjoyable experiences that build a sense of belonging, competence and confidence that the pupil may not otherwise access. This can have a positive impact on social emotional development and may transfer to academic outcomes. This results in a child doing better than expected despite existing adversity.

This thesis has also introduced the idea of resilient habitus – the ability to respond to adversity by transferring ways of being and performing between contrasting fields. I have likened this to a social chameleon - the ability to mimic and embody a demeanour in accordance to the social situation. Research points to second language acquisition and accent mastery at its height in childhood and diminishing thereafter. Many of the children highlighted in this thesis demonstrated rapid adaptation to the field of the ECA. Middle childhood may be an optimal time to engage a child facing adversity to ECA and the best time in which to experience, adapt and master new fields before settling into our ways.

In the following two sections of this chapter, I consider the strengths and limitations of this thesis and propose areas of future research.

## **7.12 Strengths and Limitations**

Although we know a great deal about the benefits of children and young people participating in ECA, much less is known about how participation first begins, especially for disadvantaged children for whom research indicates the most benefit might occur through ECA participation. This thesis has striven to provide insight into how participation in ECA first begins and then how this is sustained for children facing disadvantage and adversity who had hitherto never participated.

By applying critical realist analytic processes of abduction and retroduction, I have sought a theoretical engagement with the twenty interviews beyond a purely descriptive level in order to identify processes for triggering and sustaining ECA. My assumption is that if we

know what underlies a certain course of events we can also intervene or direct future courses of events and to optimise the potential of repeating these events. An understanding of what has a tendency to work in an open system, such as a primary school, can potentially enable other schools and interventions to replicate these variables to predict a tendency towards future successful outcomes for other FSM children in Key Stage 2, who have never participated in a school ECA. Practitioner accounts of success stories and explanations of potential processes of this success are vital in shedding light to help us ‘understand as clearly as possible what it is [practitioners] need to do to make things better’ (Hart et al. 2007). Adopting an ecological perspective also allows us to document the environmental factors most likely to help children to succeed (Sroufe et al., 2005) within primary school.

But we must constantly bear in mind that these twenty accounts were selected because they represented stories of successful ECA engagement of a child in receipt of FSM and facing adversity. Therefore the claims made must be tempered by the small number and the selection criteria. To this extent, these stories should be treated as ‘ideal types’ in a Weberian tradition and the data should be analysed within this context. This was a small intensive research that seeks to explain how a process of successful ECA in primary school worked for these twenty children. I recognise the limitations in dealing with small numbers of accounts told uniquely from the practitioners’ perspective, and the claims that we can formulate from them. As a researcher I can only point to tendencies that may occur, given the themes and theories identified, should similar processes take place in other UK primary schools.

The aim of assembling twenty practitioner stories in detail was to see a specificity and a context in some fine grain.. Given my ontological understanding of the complexity and emergence of social phenomena, I recognise that the regularity of events, the likelihood of phenomena replicating themselves, and thereby the prediction of outcomes, is problematic, especially from only 20 stories. From an ecological developmental perspective, informed by critical realism, I recognise social science operating in open systems that contain innumerable, complex, interacting factors, which produce only general trends (Alderson, 2013; Bhaskar, 1998). The best that my thesis can offer is to look for tendencies, but not certainties.

What I was setting up in the method of the thesis, therefore, was not a replication of controlled comparison in the ways that that is done with large-scale studies, but the setting up of opportunities to think critically about the meaning of the interviews in relation to larger education issues of educational engagement and student outcomes and my understanding of

the process that generated the successful events as described by the practitioners from these 20 success stories.

The notion of a resilient habitus, rather than mindset, can allow for schools to recognise the mental adjustments that some children succeed in making between contrasting fields. A resilient habitus and ZPD (where a child begins and what a child is capable of achieving through assistance with a practitioner) helps us understand achievement to be seen in absolute terms. Achievements become the distance travelled and not the level obtained.

### **7.13 Further research**

In the light of my findings, discussion and limitations I have identified five areas that warrant further investigation.

#### **1. The child's perspective**

Whilst these findings have highlighted the crucial roles of practitioners in schools, both in the triggering and sustaining stages of ECA for FSM children in middle childhood, future research that interviews the children themselves would provide further explanations to the processes involved in the resilience building through engagement in ECA. This would allow us to compare and contrast the practitioner and child perspectives. Issues to explore include: how the child perceives themselves after a period of ECA engagement and, does the child believe they and their relationship with school have changed since attending an ECA? This would not only provide rich data upon the alignments of both practitioner and child perspectives but would also provide insights into the child's sensitivities towards having forged an ECA habitus.

#### **2. Habitus transfer**

Four of the practitioners reported confidently that the child was now more engaged in other school activities as a result of the ECA. Only two of the practitioners were the child's classroom teacher and, therefore, had intimate knowledge of the child's academic success since participating in the ECA. Further research should investigate the extent to which a habitus formed within ECA is transferable to other school settings, that is, the classroom and

other ECAs. This would shed light upon the degree to which the habitus formed within the ECA field and the degree to which it can be transferred to other school settings.

### **3. A Longitudinal study**

A longitudinal study extending the six months period of data collection used in this thesis would be useful in judging the continuation of the ECA process and outcomes and their interrelationship. More specifically, the transfer from Key Stage 2 (equated with middle childhood in this thesis) to Key Stage 3 marks the transition for UK children from primary school to secondary school. This transition is particularly significant for ECA engagement because, whilst the child will continue to have the same curriculum subjects taught in their new secondary school, the same cannot be said for ECA. The child may well find that the ECA they participated in in their primary school does not exist in their secondary school. If this is the case, then does the child stop the ECA altogether, or does their newly formed ECA habitus from primary school allow them to join other ECAs in the secondary school?

### **4. Practitioners' past experiences and practice**

The role of adults in activating interests was highlighted with sixteen practitioners pointing to childhood as the commencement to their life-long hobby. Of these, six indicated a family member (predominantly parents) who had introduced them to their hobby and ten identified a teacher at Primary school (not Secondary school) as the trigger to their hobby. School, and a positive relationship with a teacher, was a recurring theme from the practitioners. However, to what extent the practitioners had reflected upon these childhood memories, in their own professional practice with children, provoked only tentative responses, with most practitioners not able to directly answer the question. Further research could shed further light into how or whether practitioners use positive childhood experiences in their own practice to promote similar positive experiences for children.

### **5. Experiential learning and feedback**

Further research might investigate the experiential nature of ECA and feedback in comparison to classroom feedback. For example, ECA feedback is often immediate and

occurs immediately in response to the activity which allows the child to try again straight away. Classroom feedback is often delayed and provided by written comments in the child's class book a few days after the written assignment.

## 7.14 Chapter Conclusion

I began this chapter by revisiting four interest theories and evaluating their relevance to explaining the events in the interview stories. I argue that *engagement* is a better term to explain childhood participation in ECA rather than *interest* or *motivation*. Identifying the proximal processes that trigger and sustain ECA participation for a child in middle childhood, the concept of engagement, rather than interest or motivation, informs how learners respond to learning environments. Engagement, therefore, is not only a psychological state but also the process of learners' connections to the learning environment. Engagement for the child equates with an emergent habitus. Engagement for the adult equates to (1) introducing the child to the ECA field, and (2) the design and expectations that are facilitated and communicated by the practitioner. Engagement allows us to examine the dynamic relationship between an adult and a child, between a teacher and a learner.

Engagement, rather than interest, permits us to explain the processes of interest formation and the route to resilience. This is because engagement is determined by what resources are available within the child's world and the adult gatekeepers to these resources. Engagement allows us to recognise the dynamics of process in determining an outcome. Explaining the proximal processes of engagement make us understand what needs to be in place for the learner.

In this chapter, I have also discussed ECA as providing a rich vein of mastery routes for which resilient outcomes of improved confidence, self-esteem, school attendance, academic performance and school connectedness or belonging are all correlated. The thread that links these stories is pupil engagement and habitus. Engagement is shown to be heavily weighted in the triggering and early stages (stage one) of sustaining upon the proximal processes of the school and practitioner in providing the field, securing the child's entry to the field, and practitioner practice (ZPD) once the child is in the field. The child's habitus formation responds to the field and ZPD. This would indicate that, to a large extent, habitus can be shaped by environments. The key to habitus formation is engagement.

This chapter also suggests that habitus explains the events in the stories better than notions of character formation, as habitus encompasses not only cognitive readjustments but ideas of belonging, identity and place. Habitus is not a state of mind but a child's emergent embodiment of identity and where they fit in. Habitus allows us to look at the ecological proximal processes that contribute to its formation: Bronfenbrenner's proximal processes 'the engines of development' (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p. 118) and Vygotsky's account of interpsychological factors determining a child's intrapsychological response (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978). I have introduced the term resilient habitus in this chapter as a notion that helps us better understand the cognitive distances, the counter trajectories of being that some children perform in contrasting fields. These substantial variances of adaptation demonstrate an elastic or malleable ability to adjust to fields that, like language acquisition and mimicry, may well be best initiated and performed in middle childhood.

The abduction stage has also revealed an additional understanding of ECA as a route to resilience. Through examining the hindrances and frustrations expressed by the practitioners, I have come to recognise a resilient outcome for the practitioner as well as the child. In this thesis the notion of resilience through the route of ECA has emerged as a symbiotic relationship between practitioner and the child: the resilient outcomes of the child (a child performing better than before the ECA engagement) rebounds upon the practitioner. The practitioner perceives that their profession is being recompensated by teaching an activity and passing on their passion to others. This practitioner success in promoting the child's success in domains they enjoy provides a level of job satisfaction. This strengthens the practitioner's willingness to persevere by providing a sense of the investment of time and energy being worthwhile. Practitioner success sustains and even reinvigorates the practitioner's resilience to long hours, work stress, and fatigue. Success stories are important.

Finally, in this chapter, I have compared the findings of the interviews with the EEF toolkit and found that there are four commonalities of feedback, peer mentoring, collaborative learning and mastery, that can be placed within the ZPD of the first stage of engagement. I have also recognised the toolkit intervention of 'meta-cognition and self-regulation' as corresponding to habitus formation in the second stage of engagement. However, I suggest that habitus rather than 'metacognition and self-regulation' allows us to understand notions of a child's emerging sense of identity, place and belonging to school, which are vital processes in the forward dynamics of a child performing better than before. Mapping the EEF toolkit onto the findings shows that 'Metacognition and Self-Regulation' are a resilient outcome for the child after sustained ECA engagement. However it is



important to remember that none of the ECAs featured in this thesis were primarily meta-cognitive, nor self-regulation or character building interventions. They were ECA interventions which had additional outcomes of self-regulation, metacognition. I resist from saying there were character outcomes from these ECA interventions. It is not character that children lack but in many cases it is a lack of routes in which to build competencies and thrive.

I have advocated that schools should concentrate upon building routes to competences with related habitus results rather than concentrating on building character. These routes should be maintained and ongoing to ensure the emergence of habitus and the continual ongoing effects, such as the child voluntarily joining other ECAs and mentoring newcomers into the ECA field. In chapters 6 and 7 I have addressed my first research aim:

- To explain how extra-curricular engagement is triggered and sustained for disadvantaged children in middle childhood.

Chapters 6 and 7 represented my abduction stage or ‘theoretical re-description of the events’ (Bygstad & Munkfield, 2011, p.5) highlighted in the twenty interviews. This abduction stage identifies the processes that drive the surface or actual and empirical domains of reality. I call these ‘proximal processes’ the ‘engines of development’, identifying these factors with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of child development (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p. 118).

In the next chapter, I consider what schools need to do encourage similar stories of successful ECA engagement. This represents the retroduction stage of critical realism data analysis. The goal of retroduction is to identify the necessary contextual conditions for a particular process to take effect. This retroduction stage is my assessment of what schools need to have in place to encourage the tendency for these events of successful ECA engagement to re-occur. The following chapter addresses my second research aim:

- To gain insight into what is needed for extra-curricular activities to be a resilience building process.

## Chapter 8. Implications

This chapter on the implications of my work represents the retrodution stage in critical realism research, whereby I recommend what needs to be in place to provide the best chance of replicating successful ECA engagement in middle childhood for disadvantaged children who have never previously participated in ECA. In recommending what needs to be in place to promote other stories of successful ECA engagement this chapter will consider how the distinctive benefits of ECA may be incorporated into the curriculum. If we can explain why some children facing adversity and disadvantage have good outcomes, then we may have important clues about how to transfer those gains to wider numbers of children who might otherwise succumb to the frequently damaging effects of adversity and disadvantage. Likewise, as discussed towards the end of chapter 7, if we can promote successful routes and outcomes for pupils, we can also promote prime/optimal teaching experiences for practitioners. Success encourages success.

This chapter will be principally concerned with what I call ‘our primary school’ and in particular, to the provision of ECA in Key Stage 2 - since middle childhood in this thesis equates with Key Stage 2 - the final three years of primary school before transition to secondary school. Our primary school represents a model or ideal type for other primary schools to exemplify. This chapter will address my second research aim:

- To gain insight into what is needed for extra-curricular activities to be a resilience building process.

I begin this chapter considering the implications from the findings for building routes to progress for disadvantaged children. Throughout this thesis I have equated resilience with a disadvantaged child facing adversity performing better in school. However, this resilient outcome cannot be considered in isolation without considering the route that led to this increased resiliency. My definition of resilience is positioned by the dynamics of engagement; resilience for the children in the twenty interviews is an emergent outcome of sustained engagement in ECA. This engagement is dependent on a dynamic and relational interaction between pupil and practitioner. In this process the practitioner is key to enabling access to ECA and providing a range of enjoyable experiences that build a sense of belonging, competence and confidence that the child may not otherwise access. This can have

a positive impact on social emotional development and may transfer to academic outcomes. This results in a child doing better than expected despite existing adversity. In this thesis there has also been an emergent awareness that success in ECA engagement also has resilient outcomes for the practitioner. This resilient outcome of satisfaction from a job well done does align with the thrust of this thesis that the success of ECA engagement is driven by practitioner practice. This chapter will be concerned with how to embed these resilient building practices into the school and how they may be incorporated into the curriculum. In line with my findings, I have placed the responsibility of successful ECA engagement away from the child and positioned them upon the school environment in which the child operates. The child's performance and development are in response to these environmental conditions.

Given the overriding evidence that it is adults and environmental resources that govern what a child does and with whom, as acknowledged in CRT, this chapter will present recommendations of what needs to be in place for primary schools to provide the optimal conditions to engage a disadvantaged child in ECA. It will do so in consideration of current UK school budgets, especially in targeting the pupil premium which amounts to an annual grant of £1320 for every primary school pupil in receipt of a Free School Meal.

In the following sections in this chapter, I recommend that ECA is embedded into the school day. As such, the term extra-curricular activities could be considered co-curricular activities or simply, curricular activities. However, I resist changing the term and will continue to use the term ECA to avoid confusion. We can now envisage the prefix 'extra' no longer with connotations of an add-on/addition/spare but value and worth.

## **8.1 Our Primary School**

Our primary school uses a model of ECA engagement which has three stages. Firstly, there is the triggering stage which is dependent on the availability of the ECA and ensuring the child's entry into the ECA. The sustaining stage is divided into two stages: the first sustaining stage is dependent upon the structuring of the activity within the ECA. This will largely dictate the child's impressions, performance and progress. The second stage of sustaining is the child's habitus alignment in response to the first stage of sustaining. This makes the triggering stage and stage one of sustaining vital in our understanding and guiding of the child's response, that is, their habitus alignment. We should not assume that these mental functions are self-generating. They require experiences and pedagogic guidance to be

set in place. These implications for the child's development support the claims by Waenerlund and colleagues (2016) that a child's newly founded coping experiences, when supported by caring adults, contribute to the development of the child's pragmatic and constructive self-systems that will assist as anchors in future attempts to deal with obstacles and problems.

Attention to character, or the lack of, as considered by recent government initiatives as an answer for why poorer students perform worse in school than their more advantaged peers, has made me realise that this reasoning has returned to the nineteenth century philanthropic arguments of social Darwinism. Despite intentions of improving the lot of the poorest urban classes, social reformers, such as Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Charles Booth and Octavia Hill considered that large numbers of the poorest classes suffered from a character deficiency. But a case conceptualisation that it is largely based on explaining deficiencies of the individual, misses the mark and fails to understand the invisible forces that shape individual performance. It is perhaps because of their invisibility that these environmental processes in shaping personal experience and psychological functioning have receded to the background. For example, Wright and Lopez (2002) make a persuasive case for how the potency of the environment in preventing or enhancing mental health and well-being, is actually underplayed in contemporary psychology. As such, the environment in psychology is considered the background, while individuals are at the foreground. The individual is seen as, 'active, moving in space, commanding attention by their behavior' (Wright & Lopez, 2002, p. 32). Furthermore:

'where the primary mission of a treatment center is to change the person, assessment procedures will be directed toward describing and labeling person attributes. The danger is that the environment scarcely enters the equation in understanding behavior' (Wright & Lopez, 2002, p. 35).

In the ECA route to resilience (a child performing better), we must remember as Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2005) argue, that resilience is more than an individual's response to tough times; 'resilience must go beyond coping with adversity. It must entail a challenge to the very structures that create disadvantage, discrimination, and oppression' (p.22). We should compare this ecological definition of resilience to the definition of character offered by Damien Hinds, the former UK Secretary of Education as the ability to bounce back from the knocks that life inevitably brings to all of us (The Guardian, 2018). For

when the frequency and severity of these knocks are unequally distributed, a child's ability to bounce back cannot be solely considered their responsibility and strength of character, but judged by the resilience of their ecology, for which school and pedagogical experiences therein play an important role in the resilience route.

The implications of the triggering and first stage of sustaining being imposed upon the child, and the child then acting in response to them, makes us consider the route to resilience as one of power and access. As Prilleltensky et al. (2008) argue, people come to regulate themselves through the internalisation of cultural prescriptions. Prescription is a particularly good description of the heteronomy processes identified in triggering and the first stage of sustaining ECA engagement. It is now time to look at what schools should prescribe to build a resilient route through ECA.

## **8.2 Triggering our Route to Resilience through ECA**

For a child to participate, opportunity is crucial. But opportunity is not enough. Young people and especially children cannot be expected to habitually choose to participate. Though educational professionals recognise the benefits associated with joining a school club, not all children can be expected to make 'the right choice' (Apple 2014), as discussed in chapter 3. Left to their own devices, we cannot expect children to choose. For example, a Sutton Trust poll found that 45 schools said that they provided debating clubs, but that only 2% of pupils reported participating. The poorest pupils were found to be least likely to take up activities (The Sutton Trust, 2014).

Our primary school should be aware of their children in receipt of FSM who enter Key Stage 2 having never participated in an ECA. Any Key Stage 2 child on this list of non-ECA participation who is underperforming in the classroom should be targeted for ECA selection. Adult invitation or selection should be encouraged because middle childhood may well be the optimum time for adult influence in introducing a child to an activity before the more rebellious stage of adolescence in which there is a tendency to reject adult driven choice.

Our primary school should be aware of the consequences of poverty and disadvantage on children's performance yet have strategies to diminish these consequences by counterbalancing negative experiences of adversity with positive ones. One strategy to counter these consequences is to incorporate ECA into our school day, thus assuring the

participation of everyone, and not just those children who chose to join and are able to stay on after school. A number of schools in this study were cognisant that some children are unable to stay on after school and made provision to make access to ECA during the school day. The girl in interview 11 needed to walk home immediately after school to help her mother. This girl would never have been able to attend an after-school club. She was selected to join the Headteacher's lunchtime Running Club. From this, she went on to represent her school and then her County in cross country running matches. Her school attendance improved as did her academic work and she became a role model in school. This success story was made responsible through a flexible timetable that allowed her to participate. Her participation was through invitation. Experiencing success in one domain improved this girl's overall school attendance. Her success in one domain allowed her to become what was described as a role model for other children in the school. Her sense of school connectedness or belonging was because ECA had been incorporated into the school day that she was able to access. ECA had provided a route to experience success, competency and increased levels of confidence. Another of the schools featured in this thesis was voted The Times Educational Supplement's Primary School of the Year award in 2015 for their creative and innovative use of the school day. The school serves a disadvantaged catchment, with half of the students eligible for free school meals, yet it had attained the best results in reading, writing and maths in the local area and the progress scores for the children were among the best in the country. The headteacher believed that this was achieved by incorporating extra-curricular activities into the school day to compliment and increase learning of the core curriculum subjects of Maths and Literacy.

Our primary school should target those children in Key Stage 2 who would most benefit from achieving in school. Children who are struggling to succeed in school may already have a hesitancy or reluctance to participate in another school activity and ECA would allow schools to broaden the access routes to success. In interview 2, the practitioner spoke of the school management asking themselves, 'Is there an avenue that can help him feel more engaged?' for the boy with ADHD and 'anger issues'. The avenue chosen was through football and tag rugby and the boy was picked for the school teams. He subsequently developed a sense of belonging to the school. 'Academically, I know that he has produced more in class, he is doing better, so yes, it [extra-curricular engagement] did have a big impact' (interview 2). The school in the interview 2 story is now using the experience with this child to pinpoint other children who might benefit from representing the school. Our primary school acknowledges from a strength-based perspective that we enjoy things we are

good at. The role model girl in the running ECA (Interview 11) and the boy representing his school in football and tag rugby (Interview 2) could be encouraged to build up their literacy skills by concentrating upon their ECA success. Through ECA we are aware of broadening our chances of developing competencies and how competency in one field can filter into other fields. We understand that competency is increased through structuring manageable tasks that can be achieved through guidance. We understand that competency building and fun are linked. We all enjoy achieving and are drawn to these activities and shy away from areas of failure. In understanding that ECA provides routes to competency building and resilience our primary school keeps ECA firmly incorporated within the curriculum and not as an “extra” bolt on activity at the end of the day.

I am aware that my thesis highlights ECA success and that there are no accounts of a poor combination of activity and child. The question of finding a good fit between the child and the ECA is interesting. The lessons from this thesis point towards not fearing to match and even unlikely combinations of activity and child may result in pleasing outcomes. Three stories highlighted that an apparent unlikeliness of child and activity actually reinforced the level of positive peer encouragement of the child, which fuelled the child’s perseverance to succeed. These adversities may well prove the catalyst to a sense of achievement. In interview 6, the practitioner spoke of the child who had joined the cycling club as not looking ‘like your usual type of child that would do it’. It was this unusualness, the apparent odd match between child and activity, that ignited a strident peer mentoring process and encouragement from the other club members, which further motivated the boy to master the activity. Scenarios that promote dynamic peer encouragement and solidarity can be created through ECAs; these are less likely to form in a traditional classroom setting. This may well be due to the experiential nature of activity. Similarly, in interview 5, the boy with weight and allergy issues found peer support and praise which fired his determination. The forest school ECA provided him with a platform to gain a reputation amongst his peers that ‘he’s not a quitter... he doesn’t get dropped behind now, you know, that’s amazing.’ In interview 15, the boy with a slight speech impediment, and whose first language was not English, went from being very shy to always the first with their hand up in the air, and being very interested in current affairs, through sustained positive feedback. In these cases of apparent unsuitability between the child and the ECA, advances in progress were often the steepest. Our primary school is prepared to do a bit of juggling in order to discover the best match for our children. We are aware that the doing, experiential nature of ECA may be particularly challenging for children experiencing physical and mental disabilities but that these challenges may also

represent a route to reduce these adversities through mastery and competence and thereby bolstering levels of confidence and self-esteem. Our primary school is also mindful that learning needs variety, surprise and movement. We encourage our teachers to take classes outside and to this end we have constructed outdoor classroom pods which offer shelter from the vagaries of our weather and allow children to broaden their experiences of learning beyond the classroom.

### **8.3 Practitioners**

The mix of practitioner and activity is important in our primary school. The findings in chapter 5 revealed that the vast majority of the practitioners structuring the ECAs were teaching their hobbies. Schools must actively recruit practitioners to run ECAs who are enthused by the activity. Therefore, schools should pool their resources of staff hobbies/passions and ECA provision. Likewise, staff should be encouraged to teach their hobby and to use their hobbies to teach the curriculum. This is another way to embed the distinctiveness of ECA into the curriculum. In interview 12, the practitioner spoke of their passion for baking to teach mathematics. In interview 9, the practitioner started an after-school club because of her love for foreign languages. In interview 5 the practitioner spoke of combining forestry school with writing. This points to the immediacy of experience that ECA affords helping to develop the core curriculum.

Parents/carers, charities and individuals from community clubs may well provide a rich pool of talent for teaching ECA. A coach who can speak of personal experiences and achievements is likely to have an amazing and engaging X factor that should appeal to children. In interview 4, the boy was able to form an attachment to his football coach who was recruited from West Ham United.

The mix of the practitioner and an ECA that they practice as a hobby, will augment qualities of enthusiasm and passion. Practitioner enthusiasm and passion may well contain a degree of contagion that will transfer to the child. The degree of the practitioner's own joy for the activity may well have implications on the level of success in engaging the child. A child may feel special and cared for by receiving an invitation or selection from a practitioner with a reputation for running a fun, enjoyable ECA.

The role of adults and schools in shaping and guiding the leisure/hobby choices of children resounds both in these stories and the past histories of the practitioners. Half the



practitioners could point to primary school, of which five identified a member of staff, as the trigger to their lifelong hobby. These past histories of developing a bond with a teacher also resonated with the practitioners' identification of the non-classroom dynamics of ECA, enabling a better chance of practitioner and pupil connection. A positive student-teacher relationship may serve as a protective mechanism to promote resiliency (Piantra et al., 1995). Establishing strong bonds between at least one adult at school and a child is especially advantageous for those children at risk (Decker et al., 2007; Hughes et al., 2007).

However, despite the often-cited advantages that ECA gave to practitioners in forming a positive bond through a non-classroom environment, frustrations were expressed in barriers to attracting or finding adults for ECA. Interviewee 2 was frustrated by a decrease in money to employ a teaching assistant for P.E. and was frustrated because they saw the benefit that the children received from participating in ECA. Interviewee 3 was frustrated because less ECA in general was now presented to the children. Interviewee 2 also pointed to staff fatigue not helping; the last thing you want to do at the end of the school day is to stay on another hour and run a club. Interviewee 9 lamented on not having another adult to help her run the club, since there was such a high level of interest. Yet, the hindrances and frustrations expressed offered insight into the value that the practitioners held for ECA in their professional of teaching. They were convinced of its benefits and many wished that more time could be dedicated to ECA in school. There was the impression that the practitioners enjoyed their role of ECA providers. There is, therefore, the sense that running ECA was fundamental to the practitioners' professional well-being. ECA made up for the other less enjoyable aspects of working in school and contributed to making the job worth pursuing; ECA made them feel valued and successful and provided them with stories that made them experience what made teaching worthwhile. Success in ECA contributed to the practitioners' resilience.

Therefore, by promoting ECA within the official school day in our primary school to target those children who would most benefit, we should also understand the benefit that this may have on staff morale and the correlation with levels of satisfaction that are specific to opportunities for teachers to experience a strong sense of community, student growth, their own personal growth, and participation in an activity of personal interest.

Although I am advocating the incorporation of ECA into the school day, this is reasonable to a point but it must not be to the detriment of ECA after 3.15pm. Clubs after 3.15pm are not "after school clubs" but school clubs and considered co-curricular. Our

primary school also recognises that selection/invitation into the initial ECA field can facilitate the child's entry into other further ECA fields after 3.15pm.

In our primary school, practitioners should be sufficiently compensated and valued for their work in ECA both during and after school. For many teachers and teaching assistants, a lunch-time activity or a further hour of ECA after 3.15pm may feel like going the extra-mile.

## **8.4 A Goal-Oriented Structure**

Our primary school should be alert and proactive in getting involved in local community projects and competitions, which include competitive matches against other schools. The practitioner in interview 17 mentioned after the interview, that debate competitions against private schools were especially motivating for his groups. ECA provides a unique avenue for pupils to represent their school both individually and as part of a team (Interviews 1,2,3,7,8,11, & 15-20). Having a goal-oriented structure was also effective in increasing levels of perseverance. This was recognised through initial failure in competition or a task but finally succeeding. It may be that ECA encourages perseverance for certain children and practitioners alike and provides a better framework for pupils and staff to build perseverance rather than class based curricular.

In search of task-oriented goals, our primary school should look outwards into the community. The art clubs featured in interviews 1 and 3 became involved in local art competitions run by the local council (Interview 1) and a nearby university (Interview 3). In the account in interview 1, it was the local council art competition that was seen to trigger the girl's engagement.

Likewise, competition, for example, sports and debating (Interviews 2,4,7, 11, 15 – 20) may well provide an opportunity for the new child to be representing their school in that activity. This dynamic of being an ambassador for the school and performing for the school is a powerful function in determining a child's belonging to their school and is unique to ECA. Our primary school should be aware of this route of experience, especially for children struggling in traditional curriculum classroom settings and struggling to function successfully at school. Lessons from ECA success suggests that competition between classes or other schools in curriculum subjects could provide a catalyst to learning. A motivation to compete and potentially beat a rival school may provide a team spirit and motivation to perform and improve competency.

Our primary school is aware that school trips - often referred to as 'enrichment' visits have little value unless these visits are transformative. Interviewee 20 mentioned that, after several weeks of silence, it was a visit to the House of Commons that triggered the girl, who never usually spoke, to engage. The visit to the House of Commons was not just a bolt on 'enrichment' visit but was linked to the ECA of debating in which the girl was participating. Such 'turning points' may well be unpredicted but they are the product of experiences. Our school should be conscious of promoting positive experiences that are not solitary, stand-alone events but can continue or be linked to ongoing events at school. This is especially important for children living with high levels of adversity. Introducing a child to horse riding or a day's mountain biking in a nearby forest serves no little purpose unless the activity is consistently repeated or can be adjusted into further ongoing activities that can drive competency and a sense of belonging. Our primary school is in the business of constructing activities that children enjoy and that want to be in school enjoying participation. It is the level of competency gain that is important. Building mastery in an activity is crucial. Our primary school is certainly flexible in making a good match between ECA and child; however, the findings also illustrate that an apparent ill-fit may provide the biggest achievement gains for the child. ZPD builds competence from each individual starting point. The least capable children may well make the greatest gains and, therefore, the largest amount of achievement. Our primary school recognises that selection/invitation into the initial ECA field can facilitate the child's entry into other further ECA fields.

Whilst these twenty stories of ECA engagement illustrate FSM children in middle childhood successfully engaging in their first ECA, our primary school is mindful that the first fit might not be the best. A child's ECA trajectory may change or require an adjustment. We are not scared to keep mixing to find the best match.

## **8.5 The Power of Feedback in Middle Childhood**

Practitioners should be aware of the power of feedback. The EEF toolkit positions feedback as the most powerful school intervention. Performance and goals associated with our ECA programme installed into the school day and school clubs after 3.15pm provide an ideal platform for feedback. The findings from this thesis illustrate that feedback may be provided both by the practitioner and by more experienced peers within the ECA. Children in the ECA should also be taught about the skill of providing effective feedback to promote

competency. The most successful feedback not only provides advice as to the next step in mastery (ZPD), but also acknowledges the achievement gained. Praising achievement may be particularly powerful for children who have struggled in school to perform successfully. Praise and highlighting achievement, no matter how small, may well be effective in countering historic failures and the child's 'learned helplessness.' Praising achievement, no matter how small, may be particularly effective for those children who have not voluntarily chosen to participate in the ECA but were selected. These selected children may well possess weak, unestablished values and expectancies, or even negative expectancies based on former school failures. Praise for these children from practitioners may be a particularly significant force in engagement in middle childhood and diminish in adolescence.

Particularly poignant for embedding resilient outcomes is children who had experienced successful engagement in ECA providing their own constructive feedback to new members of the ECA. This peer mentoring was recognised by the practitioners in several accounts and is a valuable process, not only in engagement of the new child, but in reinforcing the belonging and value (*habitus*) of the peer mentor. There is evidence to suggest from this thesis and other research that these learning strategies and attitudes developed in ECA are transferable to the classroom (Chanfreau et al., 2016; Morris, 2016). The distinctive nature of ECA in providing a particularly powerful platform for feedback to improve competency levels in children may be incorporated into the classroom curriculum through the use of competition. Maths or literacy competitions between classes and/or against other schools, regions, in which the whole class performs as a team may allow for weaker members to make the most amount of 'relative' progress aided by stronger members of the team. Practitioners could use their own hobbies, enthusiasms to build learning in the curriculum. The outdoor learning pods will be part of this ECA inspired curriculum experience.

Our practitioners should be aware of levels, the competencies that a child already possesses. It is from this level that achievement and progress and routes to attain competency can be calculated. The practitioner's recognition of where the child is coming from and any accumulated adversity in the child's life is important as this allows the practitioner to more accurately judge future progress and the added endeavour that some children are required to make. Not all children arrive to the tennis courts in appropriate clothing, possessing a tennis racquet, or even understanding the term *tennis*. Progress judged by these historical indices of where the child begins may well show that the children with the least amount of tennis knowledge makes the greatest progress in learning to play the game. When Hattie, Marsh, Neill and Richards (1997), in reference to outdoor adventure activities, declare that

interventions that take place in unfamiliar environments have the greatest effect, it must be remembered that, for the child thrust into a new school club for the first time, this unfamiliar environment effect may well be either negative or positive. The skill of the practitioner determines the extent to which this unfamiliar environment is negotiated. Recognition of where a child has come from and constraints to performing optimally, for example, poverty and adversity, are important in structuring feasible goals and manageable tasks. A child may require constant reminding of their progress. The practitioner's recognition of the child's achievement will bolster a child's sense of value and belongingness to the field.

## **8.6 Celebrating and Valuing ECA**

Our primary school has embraced ECA into the official school day. Our ethos is that ECA benefits the curriculum and also bolsters our children and staff's enjoyment of being here. We value ECA as part of our own school habitus, it is pastoral and dynamic in forming our children and their educational journeys. Looking back, our school seemed less exuberant and productive before we installed this ECA route. So, our school has dedicated space around it to feature our ECA work and achievements. This has extended to newsletters and our school website, which promotes our vigorous school ECA canvass. Our school assemblies have a strong ECA presence. The practitioners and the children understand the value of our ECA route and the contribution they bring to our exuberant school experience.

## **8.7 Sustaining the Route**

Our schools must be aware that our children move on and that child and adolescent development is not a self-generated process but a response to environmental experiences and the frequency and strength of those experiences. We must work towards sustaining the proximal process of ECA into our young individual's lives. As quoted in chapter 1:

‘Every experience is a moving force; its value can be judged only on the grounds of what it moves towards and into.’ (Dewey, 1938).

Our school is aware that the longer a child can be supported in ECA, the greater the advantages. Bohnert et al. (2010) found a correlation between the length of ECA participation

and the benefits accrued; two years of ECA participation yielded more benefits than participation for one year, and additional years of participation beyond two may provide further benefits. The provision of mastery experiences at school, especially for those children who struggle within the classroom, would appear to be beneficial, since mastery in one field may breed subsequent mastery in other fields. The skill of optimising mastery through the repeated cycles of ZPD provide a route towards habitus formation and the child identifying themselves with the field and their sense of belonging to that field. Our school is aware that a slight change to the programme, such as a term's ECA absence in the curriculum may well damage or alter the child's emergent and delicate ECA habitus.

Therefore, our primary school ECA should be a permanent feature and should not be intermittent. This may affect some sport-based clubs, which are season-based. Football is traditionally not played in the summer, for example. Where possible, the seasonal nature of the ECA, such as football or tag rugby in terms 1,2,3, and 4 should be offset with another ECA in terms 5 and 6 to help sustain the child's overall ECA engagement and to avoid the possible obstacle of re-triggering the child's engagement after a term's cessation of the ECA.

Finally, our school functions to ensure that the child's ECA engagement history is communicated in a written document with the child's secondary school. This will serve as a record of the child's competencies, achievements and interests in conjunction with their academic SATs scores. We will endeavour to make the transition to the secondary school as seamless as possible and advocate that the child is able to access similar ECA experiences in their new school.

## **8.8 A Whole-School Ethos of ECA**

Our school has taken the steps to install an ethos that understands the value and power of ECA to our overall success of the school and the well-being of the pupils and staff. Central to this ethos is an understanding of the benefits children gain from ECA and an awareness that children who would benefit from our ECAs do not always automatically choose to participate. We have not installed this ECA route in isolation but in recognition of research and our own success which has supported the research. Our school is aware of the obstacles that poverty, disadvantage and adversity bring to our children and, therefore, our ECA ethos supports the views of Agastini and Longobardi (2014) who suggest that schools with a high intake of disadvantaged students should invest their resources in ECA. Our resources include

the pupil premium and our staff and talented parents and other practitioners who come from the community to enrich our ECA curriculum. We are witnessing that ECA promotes our children's attitudes towards more engagement and enjoyment with our school. This is important and confirms, for our school, the findings of this thesis and Agastini and Longobardi (2014) that positive student relationships with school is positively related to the students' results, especially for low-income children. By looking back to before our ECA ethos was realised, we are able to see how much ECA has added to building positive school experiences.

Our school is not 'whacky' but creatively interpreting educational policy. Whilst schools are not required to provide ECA, the vast majority of state primary schools do, to a varying degree, as part of their duty to provide 'a broad and balanced curriculum', which is recognised as a statutory right of every child and young person (The Department of Education, 2013). Our embracing of the ECA route has actually preceded educational policy; we are ahead of the curve. The implementation of a new Ofsted education inspection framework introduced in September 2019 has induced state schools to be mindful of their ECA provision and impact. The new framework is looking for and measures school factors that seem to make a difference in ensuring that pupils achieve not only academically, but also in areas hitherto overlooked, such as sports and arts. The new Ofsted framework has introduced a new category of 'personal development', whereby the curriculum must enable learners 'to develop and discover their interests and talents' (Ofsted, 2019, p.12). The role and value of ECA may be witnessing a rise around the country and our school is the vanguard in this new movement. We have begun documenting our ECA success stories and are excited to show Ofsted how we have engaged our children in ECA and that this has developed interest and talents as well as enjoyment and school belonging. We are also proud of how we have incorporated ECA into the curriculum to aid academic competency. These successful stories of ECA engagement have also rippled into the classroom. We can demonstrate that since adopting our ECA route and ethos, more disadvantaged children are engaged. We can document achievement in competitions and community projects. We can also talk about the pastoral power of our route, happier children and staff enjoying their work. We do not shy from using the word 'fun' – for we understand that fun and enjoyment spring from building competencies. Our school thrives on fun. We can also point to the role of school leadership and the quality of practitioners in delivering fun pedagogical experiences.

## Chapter 9. Conclusion

This thesis has analysed twenty accounts from practitioners of ECA engagement of a disadvantaged child in middle childhood facing additional adversity. It has sought to evaluate whether this ECA engagement could be considered a route to resilience, a child performing significantly better than before, and to explain the processes of this engagement for resilience cannot be considered an outcome without examination of how this outcome occurred. Highlighting and explaining twenty accounts of ECA in middle childhood, for a child in receipt of FSM facing adversity allows me to suggest what schools need to have in place to optimise the tendency for similar stories to follow.

Eighteen practitioners judged their child to be more resilient after engaging in at least six months of ECA. Resilience in the child was equated to improved levels of confidence and an ability to persevere. These findings complement previous research highlighting the multiple known benefits of children and young people participating in organised activities (Eime et al., 2013; Denault & Poulin, 2009; McCarthy et al., 2008). These qualities and the experience of success within the field of ECA were transferred back into the classroom by six of the children and this may have occurred to more children but the six Persuade practitioners (interviews 15-16) did not work in the schools and were unable to provide this information. Accounts of increased school attendance was noted, especially on days on which the ECA took place. These findings supplement the reported benefits of ECA linked to vulnerable pupils, academically at-risk and socially disadvantaged pupils (Chanfreau et al., 2016; Morris, 2015; Nelson, 2016).

Given the acknowledgement of the potential benefit of ECA to vulnerable, academically at-risk, and socially disadvantaged children, this thesis has contributed to our knowledge about how ECA begins and how participation is sustained for these children. The sustaining of ECA being particularly important, since research shows a correlation between the length of ECA participation and the benefits accrued (Bohnert et al., 2010). The literature review in Chapter 2 pointed to parental values that are the main triggers of a child's ECA participation (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012; Wheeler, 2012; Wheeler & Green, 2014). The findings in this thesis indicate that, where parental ECA values are absent or weak, practitioners are important in introducing a child to an ECA.



The findings illuminate that it is not enough for schools to offer a wide range of ECAs. Many children who would benefit from sustained ECA need to be invited or selected. This initial invitation from a practitioner has significant repercussions; six stories illustrated a child, from initially being invited/selected into an ECA by a school practitioner, choosing subsequently to join another ECA. It is, therefore, the availability of ECA and the adult guidance, whether parent or practitioner, that triggers ECA engagement in middle childhood. For children in this research, it is the consequence of practitioner guidance and stewardship in the field of ECA that enables and develops the child's future ability to choose other ECAs.

This thesis suggests that middle childhood is potentially the ideal time for practitioner support to build an ECA route to resilience with a disadvantaged child. This optimum developmental period for adults to induce pupil ECA uptake corresponds with Oberle and colleagues' (2014) findings that the role of supportive adults on the emotional well-being of children and adolescents is most effective with 9-year-old children, where after this age, support weakens as adolescence approaches. This match is even more relevant given that research suggests that ECA participation decreases after the age of eleven (Aumetre & Poulin, 2016; Fletcher et al., 2003; Wang & Eccles, 2012; Zimmermann-Sloutskis et al., 2010). A child who has never participated in an ECA before transferring to secondary school will probably never participate at all throughout their entire education.

In this thesis, the consequences of a child experiencing ECA success within a school context is highlighted as especially significant given that middle childhood is a developmental stage in which children begin to compare their competencies vis-a-vis their peers. Erikson (1963) believed that children in middle childhood who do not master the skills required begin to develop a 'sense of inferiority', which can lead, in turn, to intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal consequences. To offset the onset of 'learned helplessness' (Abramson & Seligman, 1978; Seligman et al., 1968), where a child that has repeatedly experienced failure in one domain has given up hope of ever succeeding in other domains, this thesis indicates that ECA may offer schools an array of routes in which a child may experience success. This thesis has also illustrated that success in ECA has the potential to subsequent transference of success into the classroom. This makes ECA a valuable ally to schools as an antidote to the onset of learned helplessness. Researchers have confirmed Erikson's notion that feelings of competence and personal esteem are of central importance for a child's well-being in middle childhood (Eccles et al. 1998; Metsäpelto and Pulkkinen 2014; Oberle et al. 2014). ECA engagement would seem to be a particularly effective route to providing feelings of competency for children struggling to succeed academically in the

classroom. This thesis further supports evidence that embedding good experiences at an early age is highly beneficial. These experiences influence cognitive performance, self-esteem and self-efficacy (Hattie, 2012; Rutter, 1991; Smith, 2006;).

In offering theoretical explanation of the events accounted in the interviews of triggering and sustaining ECA, I found Bourdieu's concept of field extremely useful in providing insight into the parameters of a child's entry into ECA. From Bourdieu's concept, we can envisage life divided into different fields of activity. Each field has its own sets of positions and practices into which a child is given or denied (or chooses not to access). Without access, the child cannot learn to play the game inside the field.

Once triggering ECA has been accomplished, sustaining the child's engagement is necessary to embed the benefits of ECA participation. The findings point towards sustaining ECA engagement being determined by the manner in which the ECA was structured. Goal oriented tasks provided the ECA with a direction and purpose. Entering competitions was one factor in motivating each child to improve their competency. This required mastery of the game, and the child's awareness of their improvement and achievement. Levels of competency and enjoyment were allied with increased mastery. This equates with previous research, which linked leisure activity perseverance with perceptions of competency (Collins et al., 2016; Crane & Temple, 2014; Wankel & Sefton, 1989). Most critical in the sustaining stage of ECA was the ability of the practitioner to structure the ECA to optimise the learning environment within the ECA to promote the child's improvement and performance. This practitioner practice was theoretically identified to align with Vygotsky's ZPD, incorporating a goal-oriented activity with feedback both by the practitioner and other children (peer mentoring, and collaborative learning), which improved competency/mastery, and associated levels of enjoyment (fun). I have suggested that mastery and praise, in the form of feedback, may be particularly significant in encouraging a child to sustain the activity, especially for those children who had previously experienced little or no praise before within a school setting. The findings also point to ECA with its inclination towards experiential learning being a particularly potent field for providing powerful immediate feedback. The findings also indicate the role of praise and how this may be particularly relevant to middle childhood in building resilience and combatting learned helplessness.

This research has identified a second sustaining process, the child's emerging habitus in alignment to the field of ECA. It is the symbiosis of field and ZPD that helps form the child's habitus embodiment as the child learns the rules of the game and how to function and perform in the field. Bourdieu's notion of habitus allows insight into the emergent

dispositions which internalises the child's social location and which orient their actions within a field. Habitus also offers an explanatory tool to explore the child's sense of place within the ECA and school.

This thesis also highlights the strength of environments upon development. What a child does and with whom are predominantly prescribed by adults. These prescriptions influence the child's response, and subsequent state of being. In providing a theoretical explanation, the child's habitus formation responds to Bourdieu's field through Vygotsky's ZPD. This would indicate that, to a large extent, a child's habitus is shaped by environments. Habitus allows us to look at the ecological factors that contribute to its formation. In this thesis I have referred to the external processes of a child's environment field (triggering) and ZPD (sustaining) by applying Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) idea of 'proximal processes' as 'the engines of development' (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p. 118). These proximal processes resonate with Vygotsky's understanding of the child's social relations within their ecology that influence the child's response and development, that is, the external interpsychological factors determining a child's internal intrapsychological response (Vygotsky, 1934, 1987). Similarly, a child's internal habitus formation is in response to the environmental field.

I have introduced the idea of a resilient habitus. A resilient habitus is measured by the ability, the degree of flexibility or elasticity of being, in individuals operating in different fields. The ability to adapt or learn new ways of being may well be at their most productive in middle childhood, as demonstrated with language and accent acquisition which reaches its peak in this period. A *resilient habitus* provides us with a lens to better understand cognitive adjustments and competencies, strategies and coping mechanisms and the foundation of fitting in or belonging rather than *mindset* or *character*. This has important implications for interest and resilience theory.

This thesis described four interest theories and evaluated the effectiveness of each to explain the accounts of successful ECA engagement. It was shown how Expectancy/value theory (EVT) focusses on the individual's expectations of being successful and their value or merit for an activity. This is problematic for the sixteen children in this research who were invited/selected by an adult, as it is difficult to judge a child's initial expectations or value towards an activity in which they have never participated. The accounts in this thesis indicate that the child's expectations, and to an even greater extent, their value or assessment of the activity, develops through participation. I suggested that EVT would appear to be more

relevant in explaining the second stage of sustaining ECA, whereby the child's habitus begins to align to the field of the ECA.

Self-Regulation Theory (SDT) shares similarities with EVT and equates interest with a child's perception of their intelligence, whether it is a 'fixed entity' or a 'malleable quality.' A child possessing a 'growth mindset' (Dweck, 2010, 2015) is seen to be resilient when faced with failure or difficulties in learning. A 'growth mindset' delivers a child positive messages about their effort and strategy, motivating pupils to try harder, or to try a different strategy for learning, which does have significance for the first stage of sustaining. Like EVT, SRT is rich on learner descriptions and outcomes and is most relevant in explaining changes to the children's attitudes to learning as reported in the second stage of sustaining ECA engagement.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), unlike EVT and SRT, makes explicit how and why characteristics of social context may support or hinder a child's engagement. SDT also recognises that *availability* of resources is not uniform to all learners. This makes SDT relevant to the triggering stage of ECA engagement, that is, the availability of the ECA field. SDT also recognises the role of competency in fuelling interest. People derive an inherent satisfaction from exercising and extending their capabilities. Competency and enjoyment may be co-dependent. It is this need for competence that provides the synergy for learning and contributed to the stories in this thesis. SDT also acknowledges the role of feedback in driving competency. Belonging or 'relatedness' is also considered an important factor in interest formation. I argued that SDT was useful in explaining stage one and both stages of sustaining ECA engagement.

Co-Regulation Theory (CRT) recognises that much of what we do is not through choice. In middle childhood, it is adults that shape and guide participation in activities to greater extent than in adolescence and adulthood. CRT understands that the notion of choice, especially in childhood, can be misleading when understanding the motivation of a child. This thesis supports the position of CRT that it is the cultural and social relationships that influence, challenge, shape, and guide ('co-regulate') a child's identity (McCaslin, 2004) and that this is a continuous process that emerges through participation and validation. This lends CRT to Vygotsky's perspective on the social origins of higher psychological processes (Vygotsky, 1978) and the role of activity and emergent interaction in human functioning (Wertsch & Stone, 1985). CRT also recognises that the essential construct in interest is the establishment of 'belongingness' (McCaslin, 2009). As social beings, humans seek a sense of belongingness, which is realised through participation. In fact, CRT goes further than SDT in

identifying belongingness, through participation, as a basic human need. In this thesis, I suggest that belongingness embeds children as a result of their social relationships and culture through validation and membership to fields. Thus, what children do and with whom they engage with informs who we they might become.

In this thesis I suggest that CRT, followed by SDT theory, best explain the triggering and sustaining events of the twenty accounts of successful ECA. The other two theories, EVT and SRT, only provide insight into the second stage of sustaining ECA. However, I have also suggested in this thesis that the term *engagement* rather than *interest* illuminates the process of these children participating in an ECA for at least six months. *Engagement*, in these stories, is shown to be heavily weighted in the child's proximal processes. Unlike interest or motivation, the term engagement allows us to acknowledge the dynamic between those performing the engaging and those being engaged. Firstly, the performers of engagement are represented by the school and the practitioner in the triggering stage, that is, securing the child to enter the ECA field. Secondly, in the first stage of sustaining ECA engagement, it is the practitioner and their practice (ZPD) that determines the success of this stage. The term engagement encapsulates both the triggering and sustaining of a child's ECA participation by recognising that interest or motivation may not be expressed or known by a child but requires stimulating or constructing. Interest becomes the outcome of successful engagement. This draws our attention to the quality of a child's environment to afford and introduce a child to positive competence-building experiences. Beyond home life, school is the most consistent context within a child's ecology in which these competence-building routes can be built. Engagement, rather than interest, permits us to explain the processes of interest formation and the route to resilience. This is because engagement is determined by what resources are available within the child's world and the adult gatekeepers to these resources. Engagement allows us to recognise the dynamics of process in determining an outcome. Explaining the proximal processes of engagement allows us to understand what needs to be in place for the learner.

As with engagement, a child's resilience, their ability to confront and surmount adversity, is deeply driven by the quality of their environment. Through the use of abduction, providing a theoretical description of events accounted in the interview, indicated the significant role of adults in triggering and the first stage of engagement of ECA. This places the resilient outcomes, the child's improved self-confidence and ability to persevere, to be the result of (i) ECA provision, (ii) practitioner invitation/selection of the child into the ECA, followed by (iii) practitioner practice in the ECA. This in turn places resilience, a child doing

better than before, as a route constructed by practitioners and practitioner led. Concerning notions of ‘character’, ‘mindset’, ‘meta-cognition and self-regulation’ the level of successful coping that a child demonstrates cannot be purely a result of personal traits, but an accumulation of environmental factors, the proximal processes, both at home and school, that facilitate or hinder the child’s adaptation. So resilience cannot be considered an outcome in isolation. Resilience is an emergent outcome of sustained engagement in ECAs, which depends upon a dynamic and relational interaction between pupil and practitioner. In this process the practitioner is key to enabling access to ECA and providing a range of enjoyable experiences that build a sense of belonging, competence and confidence that the child may not otherwise access. This can have a positive impact on social emotional development and may transfer to academic outcomes. This results in a child doing better than expected despite existing adversity.

I also suggest that the concept of habitus explains the resilient outcomes of the child better than notions of character or mindset, as habitus encompasses not only cognitive readjustments but ideas of belonging, identity and place. Habitus is not simply a state of mind or a character trait but a child’s emergent embodiment of identity and a sense of where they fit in. Therefore, schools should concentrate upon building routes to competences with related habitus results rather than concentrating on building character. The findings also point to the effectiveness of building pupil competency, rather than character, and question whether interventions that directly set out to teach character work effectively. Unlike recommended interventions such as PATHS and Positive Action (The Social Mobility Commission, 2015), none of the accounts of successful ECA engagement set out to teach character or resilience. These ECAs highlighted in this thesis concentrated upon performance, both team and individual, within the field of the ECA. I have highlighted the increasing emphasis placed on educational initiatives to build pupil character as a route to bridging the attainment gap between richer and poorer students in the UK, whilst at the same time questioning whether character can be taught. If we seek to build character, for example, an ability to improve perseverance and increased levels of pupil self-confidence, the immediacy of experiential ECA engagement may be especially effective, especially for children in middle childhood who struggle to succeed in the classroom. Mapping the findings of these twenty successful stories of middle childhood ECA engagement onto the EEF toolkit, highlighted four commonalities with high scoring interventions identified within the toolkit: Mastery +5, Peer Mentoring +5, Collaborative Learning +5 and Feedback +8. The findings have implications for school interventions indicating that ECA may provide a school multiple routes of multiple

benefits and is significantly undervalued in the EEF toolkit (Sports Participation +2 and Arts Participation +2).

In explaining how these successful events happened has equally highlighted that the outcomes of these events present resilient outcomes for the child and for the practitioner. In structuring success, the practitioner also experiences validation, a sense of achievement in their practice. Teaching success bolsters a practitioner's sense of doing a good job and their levels of job satisfaction. These success stories exist as beacons that illustrate the worthiness of their endeavour and increase the willingness practitioners to persevere in their profession. Schools, therefore, need to maximise their steps to success, such that pupils and staff benefit. Inextricably linked to these steps must be a school ethos that understands the value and power of ECA to the overall success of the school and the well-being of the pupils and staff.

Central to this school ethos is an understanding of the benefits children gain from ECA and an awareness of children who would benefit from the ECAs but who do not always automatically choose to participate. For a child to participate, opportunity is crucial. But opportunity is not enough. Children cannot be expected to habitually choose and make 'the right choice' (Apple, 2014) to participate in ECA. As children enter middle childhood, schools should make note of children in receipt of FSM facing adversity who have never participated in an ECA and engage these children in an ECA. Lunchtime ECA is one way of attracting children who cannot stay after school when most ECAs take place. Incorporating ECA characteristic into the core curriculum may also encourage similar routes to competency, success and resilience. Schools must achieve sustainability of ECA experiences and wherever possible, provide additional routes to follow for children engaged in seasonal activities.

Primary schools should utilise the hobbies of their staff; this is a teaching treasure. Staff with hobbies, interests and passions should be encouraged to utilise these to teach curriculum subjects in addition to ECAs. In the absence of impassioned staff, schools should recruit enthusiastic and knowledgeable practitioners to run ECAs. Schools should refrain from viewing ECA as being purely a vessel to fill time either in lunch time or after school. ECAs should be focussed on building competencies and be goal oriented with a project or competition in which building levels of competency matters, which can be measured and praised. Schools should be alert and proactive in getting involved or even organising local projects and competitions with other schools. ECA provides a unique route for pupils to represent their school both individually and as part of a team. Representing your school strengthens a child's sense of value and belonging to their school. Representing your school

might be particularly powerful in forming a sense of belonging for a child who struggles to succeed academically.

The practitioners who run ECAs should be valued and the work they achieve in ECA recognised as adding quality to their school performance. Schools must also be attentive to affording ECA space and time. Schools need to be mindful of providing adequate space around the school to feature ECA work and achievements. This coverage should extend to newsletters and school websites, which should promote the vigorous school ECA scene. School assemblies require a strong ECA presence.

However, as I close this thesis, I am aware and increasingly hopeful that the value and function of ECA may be itself experiencing a transformation in our schools. The new Ofsted education inspection framework that began in September 2019 now recognises and will measure school factors that seem to make a difference by ensuring that pupils not only achieve academically, but also in areas such as sports or arts. In doing so, the new Ofsted framework introduces a new category of ‘personal development’, whereby the curriculum must enable learners to discover and develop interests and talents. This will hopefully encourage schools to prioritise ECA more than they have done in the past. But it is important that those children who stand to benefit most are not left as bystanders on this route to resilience.

In writing this thesis, I have recognised the limitations in dealing with small numbers of accounts ( $n = 20$ ) told uniquely from the practitioners’ perspective. I recognise social science operating in open systems that contain innumerable, complex, interacting factors, which produce only general trends (Alderson, 2013; Bhaskar, 1998). The best that my thesis can offer is to look for tendencies, but not certainties. My assumption in this process is that if we know what underlies a certain course of events we can also intervene or direct future courses of events and make them correspond better with good intentions and purposes. An understanding of what has a tendency to work in an open system, such as a primary school, can potentially enable other schools and interventions to replicate these variables to predict a tendency towards future successful outcomes for other FSM children in middle childhood who have never participated in a school ECA. Practitioner accounts of success stories and explanations of the causes of this success are vital in shedding light to helps us ‘understand as clearly as possible what it is [practitioners] need to do to make things better’ (Hart et al. 2007). Adopting an ecological perspective also allows us to document the environmental factors most likely to help children to succeed (Sroufe et al., 2005) within primary school.



These twenty accounts of successful ECA engagement should be treated as ‘ideal types’ in a Weberian tradition and the data should be analysed within this context. They are extremely useful because investigating successful events helps us to explain how these successful events occurred and to prescribe similar contextual processes to promote optimal environmental conditions for further successful events.

I believe this research has prompted five areas that warrant further research. First, whilst these findings have highlighted the crucial roles of practitioners in schools, both in the triggering and sustaining stages of ECA, future research interviewing the children themselves would provide further insight to the processes of resilience building through engagement in ECA. Second, further research could investigate the extent to which a habitus formed within ECA is transferable to other school settings, that is, the classroom and other ECAs. This would provide valuable insight into how success in one domain can unleash success in other domains. Third, a longitudinal study extending the six-month period used in this thesis would be useful in judging the continuation of the ECA process and outcomes and their interrelationship. More specifically, the transfer from Key Stage 2 (equated with middle childhood in this thesis) to Key Stage 3, marks the transition for UK children from primary school to secondary school. This transition is particularly significant for ECA engagement as, whilst the child will continue to have the same curriculum subjects taught in their new secondary school, the same cannot be said for ECA. The child may well find that the ECA they participated in in their primary school does not exist in their secondary school. If this is the case, does the child stop ECA altogether, or does their newly formed ECA habitus from primary school allow them to join other ECA in the secondary school? Fourth, the role of adults in activating interests was highlighted with sixteen practitioners pointing to childhood as the commencement to their life-long hobby. However, to what extent the practitioners had reflected upon these childhood memories, in their own professional practice with children, provoked only tentative responses, with most practitioners not able to directly answer the question. Further research could shed further light into how or whether practitioners use positive childhood experiences in their own practice and whether using memory promotes similar positive outcomes for other children. Finally, it would be useful for future research to examine the efficacy and dynamics of experiential ECA upon providing a platform for feedback and promoting performance. These findings could link to building levels of perseverance and self-esteem so closely linked to ECA engagement in this thesis.

I began this thesis writing about my brief encounter with a boy from Preston many years ago in the Lake District. I wish to finish this thesis by rewriting this story, imagining events, if as I think, they could have turned out, given the proper structures and support. These things are the very processes that this thesis points towards. They are forces that the boy from Preston cannot control but nevertheless influence him in profound ways. Some of these forces are discernible yet concrete, invisible, working beneath the surface. Invisible and discernible, they are generative forces that help shape his young life.

In a parallel universe, the boy from Preston had a teacher who enjoyed hillwalking and rock climbing. His teacher persuaded the head teacher of the school to install a small climbing wall in the playground. The teacher began a Climbing Club and invited children to join. One of the children he invited was a boy who lived with his mother on the nearby estate close to the school. The boy's mother had health problems and the boy never remained after school for clubs but hurried back home. In order to secure the participation of the boy and others like him, the teacher realised he had to run the Climbing Club during lunch break. This meant the teacher went without lunch one day a week, each Wednesday in fact, when the club held its session in the playground. But the headteacher and dinner ladies always made sure a lunch was kept back for him and he was able to reheat it in the staff room microwave on first lesson after lunch on Wednesdays, which was now designated his teacher progress period. The timetable had been altered to ensure the lunchtime Climbing Club could take place.

The teacher was also keen to extend the Climbing Club out of the playground and into the wonderful natural resources that lay within an hour's drive of the school. He managed to obtain a grant from The Lake District National Park to hire a minibus and take fifteen children from Year 6 to Shepherds Crag. This was so popular, a day away from school, that it became a termly event, and children began to measure their progress on the various grades that this Cumbrian site offered.

The teacher recognised the boy's progress. At first, he had been shy and didn't talk a great deal. But the teacher was attentive and kept encouraging and demonstrating what the child needed to do to progress higher up the practice wall. He knew it had been the only school club had participated in to date. Throughout his final year at primary school, the teacher witnessed the boy progress from shy novice to a competent member of Wednesday's climbing club. The boy was encouraging others to join and mentored new members. Teachers reported that he was also contributing more in class and happier to put his hand up and to ask for help if when didn't understand. The boy was smiling more in school. The teacher was concerned that on progressing to Secondary school, the boy's engagement with rock climbing

might wane if there was no infrastructure to support the boy's participation in the activity. However, other schools in Preston were also buying into the success of structured activities during the school day. The Secondary school had also recently built an indoor climbing wall in the sports hall and the P.E. teacher was a keen rock climber. His primary school Climbing-Club teacher wrote a letter to the boy's secondary school, which reported the importance of climbing in the boy's ecology. There was a strong link between the primary school and secondary schools on what had worked for their children, where their interests and competencies lay not only in core curriculum subjects but also ECAs.

The boy also came to recognise his own competency. At last he had found something at school that he was good at and that he enjoyed. He liked initiating new members and showing them how it was done. When it came to his transition to Secondary school, he joined the Climbing Club and progressed to become Club President in his final year. In his adolescence, climbing became his identity. It gave his life a direction and meaning. Though he was never truly academically minded, through his secondary school P.E teacher, he discovered a rich heritage of climbing literature and working-class climbing heroes, people like Joe Brown, Don Whillans and Doug Scott. His favourite book was *Touching the Void* by Joe Simpson. He joined a climbing club out of school and was ecstatic when Preston built a state-of-the-art climbing wall in the municipal sports centre. The money was a healthy grant from Sports England in response to the Department of Education promoting the role of ECA in 'personal development.' Often at weekends, he would join his mates from the club and drive up the M6 turning left for Kendal and spend a weekend camping and climbing in The Lakes. Here he put up a few new routes and these entered the guide book. One he named after himself, Jake's Progress, which was his first ever E5 (Extreme 5 – a grade of difficulty).

Whilst many of his school peers went on to university or technical college, Jake found work in Langdale as an instructor at an Activity Centre for schools. He had a room in the Activity Centre. And the Lakes, once a distant unknown place, became his place of work and leisure. One day he was leading a group of primary school children from his home-town, Preston. He watched as a young boy began to climb...

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## Appendix One

### Email Confirming Ethical Approval

Dear David,

Thank you for your resubmission to CREC. Attached is a formal letter of approval for the project, but I just wanted to say that you replied to the issues raised in a very comprehensive and articulate manner. Your study has raised some very interesting issues which in the way of all interesting ethical issues do not have a single easy 'right' solution. The argument you put forward reassured me that you have fully considered the sensitivities and complexities of the situation. I wonder if you would consider giving permission for me to use your work, fully anonymised, as a trigger for discussion in a staff development session that I will be running in a few months. It is exactly these difficult, grey areas that are useful to explore when trying to raise awareness of the ethical dimension of research.

Kind regards,

Lucy

Dr Lucy Redhead  
Chair of the College Research Ethics Committee  
College of Life Health and Physical Sciences  
University of Brighton  
school office 01273 643772  
direct line 01273 643650

## Appendix Two

Email to Head Teachers

Dear Headteacher,

I am part of a resilience research cluster at the University of Brighton (School of Health Sciences), with ongoing projects throughout the UK promoting academic resilience in schools, enabling disadvantaged students to achieve better educational outcomes.

Schools are increasingly expected to show that they are effectively using the Pupil Premium strategically to improve social mobility by reducing the barriers to learning for each FSM child. As part of my PhD, under the lead supervision of Professor Angie Hart, we have identified a gap in knowledge regarding the potential for extra-curricular activity to enhance the resilience of disadvantaged children. To explore this, I plan to interview 20 school practitioners who have succeeded in triggering and sustaining a FSM Key Stage 2 child's interest in an extra-curricular activity. This will allow us to better understand whether sustained extra-curricular activities would have a suitable long-term impact on resilience of children with social disadvantages, and how these success stories may be replicated for other children.

Can you think of any member of your school staff who has managed to trigger and sustain the interest (for at least six months within the last year) of a FSM Key Stage 2 child facing adversity, who had hitherto shown no interest, in an extra-curricular activity? If yes, I would be very interested to talk with that practitioner with the possibility of them participating in my research through an interview and invitation to partake in a Resilience Forum at the University of Brighton.

If you can think of such a person please could you circulate this e-mail to your member of staff.

Likewise please could you circulate this e-mail to other head teachers you think may be interested.

In a time when child poverty in the UK is growing and social mobility shrinking it is important to examine and share stories of success and exceptional practice.

Best wishes,

David Glynne-Percy.

## Appendix Three

Information Sheet for Practitioners

David Glynne-Percy

University of Brighton, School of Health Sciences,

Mayfield House,

Falmer,

Brighton BN1 9PH

Email: d.glynne-percy@brighton.ac.uk

Triggering and sustaining serious leisure participation as a route to resilience in middle childhood: practitioners' perspectives.

I would like to invite you to take part in my research study. This study aims to better understand how interest in extra-curricular activities is first triggered and then sustained with Key stage 2 children especially for those who had hitherto demonstrated no history of interest and persevering with an activity. You have been chosen because you can tell the story of a FSM child facing adversity who first engaged in an extra-curricular activity in Key Stage 2.

Please read this information sheet carefully before agreeing to participate in this study.

As part of a team of researchers at the University of Brighton committed to developing a better understanding of the concept of "resilience" and especially how to facilitate resilience for more disadvantaged children and young people, I am particularly interested in the role of hobbies/leisure activities in promoting well-being in vulnerable children, and to see whether this leisure participation may manifest in better behaviour, attendance, academic achievement and general school engagement of that child.

If you agree to participate I will travel to your school (at a date of your convenience) to interview you with a series of questions specific to your story of engaging a child in an extra-curricular activity. The interview will be roughly one hour long and will be recorded, but not filmed, in its entirety and will then be transcribed verbatim, along with all the other participant's interviews, to be analysed in the process of my PhD thesis.

At a later date in 2017 you will be invited to partake in a Resilience Forum organised by the University of Brighton where I shall present the data gathered from all the interviews.

This will be an opportunity for you to meet the other participants and the nature of the Forum is to allow you all to comment on the data and to discuss how we might take this forward. This Forum will also be open to anyone else interested in school based resilience and will be audiotaped. Your travelling expenses for attending this Forum will be reimbursed.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any moment without giving a reason. Nevertheless any data that you have already provided may not be possible or desirable to remove or destroy.

Throughout the interview and Resilience Forum a strict code of confidentiality will be maintained. Anonymity of all children and any other individuals mentioned in your interview will be kept as well as the name of schools. Any issues of safeguarding that might arise from the data collection, that are not already under investigation, will be dealt with by complying with each school's safeguarding policy.

If you believe there is a problem or that you have been misinformed you may address your concerns to the head teacher of your school (Supply name and address of each head teacher relevant to each participant).

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Brighton College of life, Health and Physical Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

This research is organised by the University of Brighton and is funded by myself, David Glynne-Percy. The data will be published in the form of a PhD dissertation with subsequent journal articles and conference papers. The data analysis will be undertaken by myself with support from my university supervisors; Professor Angie Hart, Dr. S. Eryigit-Madzwamuse and Dr. J.M. Cameron. It will also draw on discussion of emerging findings held at the Resilience Forum meeting.

The data will be retained on my password protected university computer and with a hard copy kept in one of my supervisor's locked files and will be destroyed after 10 years.

After reading and careful consideration of this information sheet I hope you agree to participate in this research by completing the consent form. Your participation is greatly valued and the contribution of your story in generating better knowledge of excellent practice will help provide informed insight into ways of improving disadvantaged children's outcomes.

Best wishes,

David Glynne-Percy.

## Appendix Four

### The Consent Form for School Practitioners

Triggering and sustaining serious leisure interest as a route to resilience in middle childhood: a practitioner perspective.

Please initial or tick the box

I agree to take part in this research which is to investigate how disadvantaged children can be supported in school to partake and persevere in extra-curricular activities.

I have read the information sheet and I understand the principles and procedures and possible risks involved.

I understand that my participation in the above research will involve me undertaking an interview lasting approximately one hour and optionally participating, at a later date, in a Resilience Forum at the University of Brighton.

I understand how the data will be collated and used and that I or any children or individuals and schools mentioned in the interview or Resilience Forum will be anonymised and not identified in the research.



I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will normally be seen only by researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else.

I understand that that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving reason and without incurring consequences from doing so.

I agree that should I withdraw from the study at any time the data collected up to that point may be used by the researcher for the purposes described in the information sheet.

I understand and agree that the interview and the Resilience Forum will be audiotaped.

I understand that once the research has been published, the recorded data will be kept anonymised for ten years and then destroyed.

Name of participant.....

Signature of participant .....

Date .....

Name of researcher .....

Signature of researcher.....

Date .....

## Appendix Five

### The Semi-Structured Interview

- 1) Can you tell me a little bit about yourself - how long you have been a teacher/working in a school context?
  - 2) How long have you been teaching extra-curricular activities?
  - 3) Do you have any hobbies/leisure activity/activities yourself?
  - 4) How important is this activity/activities to you?
  - 5) Can you recollect how the interest in your hobby/activity was first triggered and how that interest was sustained?
  - 6) Are any childhood memories of engaging in an activity poignant for you in your teaching role?
- 7) Can you explain why you have chosen to share this particular story of triggering and sustaining this individual child's interest?
- 8) What triggered this child's extra-curricular engagement?
- 9) What do you think enabled this child to sustain/ keep engaged in the extra-curricular activity?
- 10) What impact do you believe this extra-curricular participation has had on the child's school attendance, academic performance, behaviour, and general feedback from staff/parents/others.
- 11) Do you think there are any external factors, both within the school and beyond the school that have helped or hindered you engaging and sustaining the child's interest in this activity? Has this experience made you change or modify your teaching of this activity?
- 12) What is your understanding of the term "resilience"?
- 13) Do you believe that participating in this extra-curricular activity strengthened this child's resilience?
- 14) I would like you now to look at this. The Resilience Framework. It has been designed by my senior supervisor Professor Angie Hart and with one of her colleagues at the University of Brighton and practitioners, parents and young people. It takes a broad ecological perspective on all the elements that contribute to fostering resilience in children and young people. I wonder if you might try and position your experiences of teaching extra-curricular activities story within the Resilience Framework?
- 15) Is there anything you think is missing from the Resilience Framework that you would like to add?

16) I wonder if you would be able to draw a timeline on this piece of paper to illustrate the events and circumstances you believe to be important in triggering and sustaining the child's interest in this story. Were there, for example, a sequence of significant moments that contributed to the successful outcome? Can you list any tipping points? Were there any setbacks?

Thank you very much for participating in this interview

## Appendix Six

Three character building school interventions recommended by The Social Mobility Commission and the Education Endowment Foundation.

Intervention programme one.

**PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies)** has been developed at Pennsylvania State University (PSU ) and is most associated with the work of Durlak and colleagues. The British based version license for the programme is provided by Barnardo's.

PATHS is a school-based social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum that teaches children to how to manage their behaviour, understand their emotions, and work well with others. It is a universal intervention provided to all children in a given class setting. PATHS consists of a series of lessons that cover topics from identifying and labelling feelings, controlling impulses, reducing stress, and understanding other people's perspectives. This SEL curriculum is supplemented by activities that support the application of new skills using, for example, a playground incident to demonstrate the importance of resolving conflicts peacefully.

PATHS is grounded in the science of children's brain development, which has determined that children experience and react to strong emotions before developing the cognitive abilities to verbalize them. By teaching specific strategies and skills in the five domains of social and emotional development (self-control, emotional understanding, positive self-esteem, relationships and interpersonal problem-solving skills), PATHS claims to improve emotion knowledge & awareness, self-control, social problem solving as well as reducing anti -social behaviour, and improving cognitive abilities (executive functions).

According to the Education Endowment Foundation ([https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Support/Campaigns/Evaluation\\_Reports/EEF](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Support/Campaigns/Evaluation_Reports/EEF)) recent meta-analyses have provided evidence to support this assertion, demonstrating that high quality, well implemented SEL programmes can impact positively upon a range of outcomes for children, including their academic attainment (Durlak et al. 2011; Sklad et al. 2012; Wigelsworth,). There is also evidence from individual studies and meta-analyses that children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds may experience differential gains from exposure to SEL interventions when compared to their more affluent peers, albeit in relation to social, emotional and behavioural outcomes rather than academic attainment per se (Holsen et al., 2009; Wilson and Lipsey, 2007). However, it

is important to note, that the studies in this body of evidence involved, the programme developers, and so there is a clear need for independent replication.

Intervention programme two.

**Positive Action (PA)** is a school-based program consisting of 140 fifteen minute taught lessons delivered 2-4 times a week. The content of the classroom curriculum is taught through six units, which teach the following:

1. **The Positive Action Philosophy and the Thoughts-Actions-Feelings about Self Circle.** This teaches generally about positive and negative actions and their meaning for and application to life.
2. **Positive Actions for Body and Mind** - This unit focuses on nutrition, exercise, sleep, hygiene and other good health habits (the physical domain), and thinking skills, problem solving, decision making, memorizing, reasoning, thinking creatively, curiosity study skills and the value of learning for the intellectual area.
3. **Social/Emotional Positive Actions for Managing Yourself Responsibly** Students are taught to manage their personal resources like time, energy, thoughts, actions, feelings, money, talents and possessions, including basic self-control or self-regulation skills.
4. **Social/Emotional Positive Actions for Getting Along with Others** - Students are taught to get along with others by treating them the way they would like to be treated, so they learn about respect, empathy, kindness, fairness, and cooperation and other ways they like to be treated.
5. **Social/Emotional Positive Actions for Being Honest with Yourself and Others** - Students are taught to be honest with themselves and others by responsibility taking, learning how to be truthful, admitting to mistakes, not blaming others, knowing their own strengths and weaknesses, and following through with commitments.
6. **Social/Emotional Positive Actions for Improving Yourself Continuously** - Students are taught how to set and achieve goals for all areas of themselves and learn how to reach goals by having the courage to try, turning problems into opportunities, believing in their potential, persisting and keeping an open mind in order to broaden their horizons.

According to Guo et al., (2015), students in the intervention programme showed:

- Improvements in self-esteem and school hassles scores
- Possible iatrogenic effect on internalizing symptoms

Other intervention programme reported effects include:

- Intervention students, compared to controls, had lower disaffection with learning and higher teacher-rated academic motivation at grade 8 (Chicago Study)
- lower normative support for aggression at grade 8 (Chicago Study)
- better social interaction skills, evidenced by higher scores on the Social Emotional and Character Development Scale (Chicago and Hawaii Studies)
- self-esteem (Guo et al., 2015)

Smokowski et al. (2016) report that the intervention group reported significantly higher self-esteem but only for those receiving 3 years of the intervention and a high number of PA lessons.

### Intervention programme three

The **FRIENDS** intervention was developed in Australia by Barrett, Webster and Turner (2000) and is a school-based, preventative programme. FRIENDS is an intervention programme underpinned by the principles of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy with the primary aim of reducing participant anxiety levels. It has been recognised by the World Health Organisation as the only evidence based programme effective in reducing anxiety as a universal and targeted intervention (WHO, 2004). FRIENDS has also been recommended by the UK Department of Education (Mental Health & Behaviour in Schools: Departmental advice for school staff, 2016)

The name of the programme is an acronym for central components of the intervention

F = Feelings

R = Remember to relax. Have quiet time.

I = I can do it! I can try my best!

E = Explore solutions and coping step plans.

N = Now reward yourself! You've done your best!

D = Don't forget to practise!

S = Smile! Stay calm, and talk to your support networks!

The programme is a ten-week intervention that can be implemented universally to whole classes, or as a targeted intervention for children with anxiety disorders or those identified as at risk. The outcomes expected for your young people include:

1) significant reductions in symptoms of anxiety and depression for up to 80% of participants.

2) developing coping and resilience strategies to help deal with stress and worries.

3) developing emotional and social skills.

- 4) supporting positive engagement with learning.

FRIENDS is based on the principles of CBT and develops skills to counter the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects of anxiety. Children develop emotional awareness and regulation skills, to identify and replace cognitions that increase anxiety with more balanced and functional ways of thinking and to develop problem-solving skills to confront and cope with situations and events that provoke anxiety. Typically the intervention consists of nine, 60 min weekly sessions delivered to whole classes of children. Children are given their own workbook and group leaders possess a session plan specifying key learning points, objectives, and core activities for each session. All facilitators have at least an undergraduate university degree in a relevant discipline (eg, social science or education), appropriate professional backgrounds (for example, psychology, nursing, or education), or experience of working with children or young people. An initial 2-day training and subsequent accredited FRIENDS trainers provide supervision every 2 weeks. Supervision is in a group format and consists of review of session plans, the underlying cognitive model, class and behaviour management skills, and any interpersonal difficulties or communication problems with the class teacher. In the school-led FRIENDS programme, sessions were led by a teacher or member of the school staff (eg, teaching assistant) who were trained in delivery of the programme and were supported by two accredited FRIENDS trainers. School staff are required to attend a 2 day initial training course and are offered ongoing supervision



## Appendix Seven

### Resume of the Interview Transcripts

#### Interview 1

Primary School A is situated in a deprived ward of a south coast city. The school is rated by Ofsted to be Good in all areas. The proportion of the school's pupils who are supported by the pupil premium is much higher than the national average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is well above average. The largest groups are of pupils who have behaviour, emotional and social difficulties, and those who need extra support to improve their speech, language and communication skills.

The club was £1 per hour and the child was now an assistant in the Key Stage 1 Art club.

Miss Rowan has been a teaching assistant for 5 years and has working at school Y for the past 2 years.

Miss Rowan does "a lot of art" in her free time and she runs the school Art Club. She considers art to be the way she views the world.

Miss Rowan believes that the child's interest was triggered by an art competition launched by the local council for schools to design some buildings and the best designs would be exhibited. The child in question has special educational needs, she has poor sight and hearing and uses a cane - art might not be the first choice one would think of for choosing to participate in your first ever school club.

Miss Rowan believes that the art competition gave the club "something to work towards" and rather than just being a piece of work, it became a process having that opportunity to have it displayed was really kept her going. Miss Rowan also spoke of the child's parents and the whole school being extremely positive to her participation.

Miss Rowan believes that the child's confidence is growing, and she is developing a pride in her work by discovering not to rush at things but to take time and think about what she is going to do. The child was also able to see that her work was improving by taking her time. Miss Rowan also believes that the members of the art club enjoyed having a freedom to come up with their own designs rather than having them dictated to by the teacher. Asked whether the child's resilience had improved since participating in the art club Miss Rowan replied: "Her confidence is so good that I now run an art club for Key Stage 1 and she comes and helps me and she does that off of her own back... and she feels part of a team."

Miss Juniper says that resilience is “huge” in school A. The school website has a large section on “mindset”. Resilience, for Miss Juniper is “facing those things that you fear a little bit...it’s being able to pick yourself back up... Carry on. Keep going.”

## Interview 2

### Primary School A (as above Interview 1)

The club was free. The child, at the time of the interview was no longer participating, since the club choices had changed, but was now attending Basket Ball Club and WASP Club

Mr Yew teaches in the same school A as Miss Rowan (Interview 1). He has been teaching PE for eight years at school A. Mr Yew plays several sports “that’s always been my background” which he considers “Massive. Absolutely massive” in his life. His love of football stems from his father who used to play with him in the garden most days after he came home from work.

Mr. Yew points to his childhood primary school extra-curricular memories, he can still remember sporting success “Primary school it was massive... It was a big part of my life.”

The story involves a boy with ADHD with “anger issues”, often kicking objects in frustration. Mr. Yew has been working with this boy for several years. After one-to-one support the boy “started to show a bit of enjoyment in PE, just that kind of flicker of actually I can do this, with a bit of support I can do this...and then he started to show interest in football club and tag rugby...” Mr. Yew says the school began to ask how can “we...take hold of this?... give him something positive, give him some success?... is there an avenue here that can help him feel more engaged in something?”

Mr. Yew also considers that the few months that the boy was given one to one support around the school and then introduced into activities with another child has really helped his integration. Mr. Yew says that the funding for one to one tuition has subsequently been withdrawn. The one to one tuition broke the child’s perception of failure. “When that one-to-one came in, he began to have successes, so those little successes in class, when he came to the PE lesson, already having had success that day, so he was ready to gain more success in PE. So that became a cycle that he’d got out of the negative cycle into the positive cycle.” It was this “cycle of positivity” that continued from P.E into the football club and tag rugby, into which he was invited, and then asked to represent the school “that really showed him that the school valued him and that he was valued by others as well, so that did impact on his

behaviour in a positive way... Academically I know that he has produced more in class, he is doing better, so yes, it did have a big impact.”

Mr. Yew says that the school is using the experience with this child to pinpoint other children who might benefit from representing the school “off-site” – a sense of showing trust in them to behave well.

Mr. Yew laments the lack of funding to employ a teaching assistant for him in P.E. In the past he had a teaching assistant who was great at engaging the kids but there is no longer the funding to support such a position.

Mr. Yew said that the headteacher wanted him to partake in this research since resilience “is massive” in this school. Mr. Yew believes resilience is “to not give up and... know failure is part of being successful.” Mr. Yew believes the boy is more resilient now from partaking in extra-curricular and although he still occasionally kicks objects he is able to discuss his frustrations with members of staff and he is also more willing to give things a go. The boy is also more capable of seeing his own success rather than being told he has done well.

Mr. Yew considers building relationships key to this success as the boy struggled with forging relationships, but also what goes on at home the night and morning before school impacts massively on school performance.

### Interview 3

School B is a Social Emotional Behaviour Difficulties and Mental Health ESBDMH. At the latest Ofsted report rates school B as Good in all areas. About 50% of pupils are from a range of ethnic minority backgrounds and a few speak English as an additional language. Almost all pupils are supported by the pupil premium; this is much higher than average.

Miss Alder has been teaching for 27 years and has been teaching extra-curricular for the same amount of time. “I am a practising artist... and I feel that my teaching is strengthened by my own practice.”

Miss Alder says her grandfather was an artist and at school “my relationship with my teacher... at a young age encouraged my interest in, in art generally.”

Miss Alder says the boy she wishes to talk about has challenging living conditions outside school but as she believes she has a very good relationship with the boy and because of that “...we’ve set up at one-to-one extra intervention.”

Miss Alder thinks that the boy’s interest was triggered by the one to one ceramics class. One-to-one interventions were being looked at as interventions in the school. Miss

Alder suggested that this boy might benefit from a one to one ceramics class. He had always struggled in a class and he could see that ceramics came easier to his peers. But Miss Alder could see that “he wanted to do more.” So a one to one class was set up and “we’ve made together a, an environmental piece of work that has, that is ... on display in the school... it’s helped him feel part of the school because his work is, his own work is on display.” She also believes that the boy’s “self-esteem and confidence” has improved “... because people have commented on it and praised him for it.” Miss Alder is hoping he will use the skills he has developed outside school and perhaps in later life and she has spoken to the boy about her own art studio – something she does not share with other students in a classroom setting. “I’d like to think it’s helped all of those things because I think if you, if you feel empowered with more skills, if you are more confident, if you feel that you belong to a place more then you are going to want to come in and be there. And if you’re there, then you’re going to do all the other things.”

The highlight for Miss Alder was when his ceramic art was exhibited at the University of East London and the boy was photographed with some important local people next to his piece of art. “He doesn’t normally like photographs. So I think that said quite a lot, you know, about his, his pride and sense of achievement.”

Miss Alder feels very frustrated that funding for arts in schools is being squeezed “because the powers that be can’t specifically link the arts with academic progress but those of us in the arts know that we support the academic... learning... in a big way.”

Miss Alder consider resilience to be how well we can keep all our balls in the air and keep smiling. She thinks the boy’s self-confidence has improved and his relationship with her has grown and relationships are part of resilience.

#### Interview 4

Mr. Ash at school B (same school as interview 3).

Mr. Ash has been teaching PE for six years and has been a staff member at school B for almost all that time and where he was given the role of Extended Schools coordinator three years ago.

Mr. Ash says that football is his hobby and sees it as a “release” from his everyday life. He says as a boy he liked watching his dad play football matches. His dad was a “good footballer.”

He thinks he tries to remember the good teachers that he looked up to and he tries not to emulate bad teachers.

Mr. Ash says he is proud to work at the school and being part of a hard-working team who try and make a difference even though it may be small.

He has chosen to talk about a boy who comes from a “tough background” who came to school B because he was close to permanent exclusion from mainstream schools. At first his behaviour was “very challenging” and the school struggled to build a relationship with the boy.

Mr. Ash thinks the school policy of pupils earning the right to attend school clubs through good behaviour helps as it gives the student an incentive to get their work done. But the boys triggering of interest was that the football club had an affiliation with West Ham United and a coach who forged a really good relationship with the boy. The boy is really into football and he is inspired to try and get channelled into West Ham’s youth program. The boy is very competitive and often used to get angry when things weren’t going well but through football and through Mr. Ash and the coach the boy has learnt how to control his anger better.

Mr. Ash is frustrated by the shrinking budget for extra-curricular, and less opportunity is now presented to the children. He is frustrated because he sees the benefit the children get from participating. He also says that staff fatigue doesn’t help. The last thing you want to do at the end of the school day is to stay on another hour and run a club. Also there is a question of being skilled enough to run an after-school club.

For Mr. Ash resilience is “never giving in, persevering” but he also later added “resilience for me is all about, you know, have, having the support around you to overcome hurdles personally.” He believes the boy’s resilience has increased through extra-curricular engagement but his home life has not helped and he has gone into care again.

#### Interview 5

Primary School C is rated Good in all areas and Outstanding in behaviour and safety of pupils. The last Ofsted report was in 2015. The school was voted primary school of the year in 2015 by the Times Educational Supplement. School C is similar in size to the average-sized UK primary school. And is situated on the edge of a large housing estate. Almost all pupils are White British. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above average. The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium is average for the UK.

The club was free as it was considered part of the school curriculum. The child was attending at the time of the interview.

Miss Juniper trained as a teacher twenty years ago and has been teaching at Primary School C for six years where she has been running the Forest school for four and a half years. Forest school is not an extra-curricular activity in school C but has been incorporated into the curriculum and features largely on the school website. Miss Juniper says she is interested in improving the writing skills of pupil premium children (FSM) by providing them with experiences to write about. She believes Forest school provides these writing opportunities.

Miss Juniper enjoys running and yoga which she says keeps her “balanced.” As a child she did a lot of drama which was encouraged by her parents and “peer influence.” Miss Juniper remembers struggling at Maths at school and feeling she had little support and is interested in working with children who struggle in certain areas”.

Miss Juniper’s story involves a boy she has worked with for three years. He has serious allergies, comes to school with epi pens and “struggles with a weight problem.” She believes his interest was triggered in Forest School by going outside away from the classroom and being given a different challenge than what he had previously encountered in P.E. where he had always struggled and detested. It is a 30-minute walk to the Forest school site and the children are required to carry buckets and other equipment. Even though he struggled at first, he rose to the challenge and made it. ‘He had that sense of yay!’ Miss Juniper believes that the child has been given different opportunities to succeed that he did not have in class. She believes that his physical triumph in Forest School taught him resilience and so subsequently the boy had the confidence to join the school bike club and the school running club. And it’s a shame you can’t meet him because he would tell you with such pride what he can do now. He has gained reputation amongst his peers that “he’s not a quitter... he doesn’t get dropped behind now, you know, that’s amazing.”

He also persuaded his family to go to a Forest School when they were on holiday in Scotland.

Miss Juniper thinks resilience is “not giving up. Persevering, um being able to have a challenge and meet that challenge and it not crush you...”

#### Interview 6

Primary school D is situated on the outskirts of a south coast city. It is rated Good in all areas. School D is smaller than an average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium (FSM) is slightly lower than the national average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is much higher

than in most other schools. Some children and pupils have very complex needs. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The school website emphasises its teaching of British values.

Miss Sycamore started teaching for 27 years and has been at School Z for the past six and extra-curricular for two years.

Miss Sycamore's hobby is cycling, an activity which was introduced to her ten years ago by her husband. She considers cycling "incredibly important" and it keeps her "sane".

In her childhood Miss Sycamore considered school important and "all the sports clubs and everything." Because she loved everything about school she wanted to be a teacher and pass on her enthusiasm.

Miss Sycamore's story concerns the after-school cycling club she runs and a boy who "used to get really, really angry." She has known the boy since he arrived in reception and has taught him for three years. She says that he was a boy who would never engage in anything and it was "quite a shock" when he agreed to participate in the cycling club because "he doesn't look like your usual type of child that would do it" and everyone was expecting him to give up. But he didn't. "The first session was really difficult for him... all the time we were saying to him sort of like "well you can stop, you can sit out if you want to... it was quite staggering actually because he kept coming back week after week, each week seeing his own improvement."

Miss Sycamore thinks it was the praise and encouragement he received from the other members of the club that kept him striving.

Miss Sycamore asked to think about why the boy participated in the beginning believes that it was a talk given to the children and a letter that went back to the parents/carers that first triggered his engagement. His mother was very supportive and also some of her friend's children were doing the bike club. She thinks too that The Bike Mender who comes in from the community and runs a bicycle maintenance class has helped. The boy has been chosen to help The Bike Mender as "we've seen sort of like the benefit that he does have from doing the bike club and so it's another way of boosting his confidence..."

Miss Sycamore believes the boy is now "Much more confident, much more willing to have a go at things...he's much more vocal within the class and within the school." She believes he is much less mummy's boy "but now he is just that little bit more independent and I am convinced that so much of it is because of the bike club." She also believes that his level of happiness has increased "he's generally just a much happier, more laid back, sort of takes things, takes things as they come more, so he's not as stressed."

Miss Sycamore says that the word resilience is used quite a bit in the school and there has been a recent “big thing” in “growth mindset” for the past eighteen months. She says the children in school D are now also familiar with the term resilience and they know it to mean “not giving up” that resilience is “that persevering and it’s just having sort of that mind-set that allows you to do that.”

#### Interview 7

School E is situated in a deprived area of London and is rated Good in all areas. The school is much larger than the average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is above that found in most schools. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action, school action plus or a statement of special educational needs is below the national average. Almost all pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest groups are from Bangladeshi, Black African, Pakistani and any other White backgrounds. Over three quarters speak English as an additional language.

Miss Lime has been a teacher for 5 years and has taught extra-curricular for the same time. Her hobbies are cycling and swimming which keep her healthy.

Miss Lime enjoyed sporting success at her primary school and secondary schools playing for several teams and “wanted to pass this onto the next generation and make these children proud of what they can succeed in. This is the reason I started a girls’ football team up.”

Miss Lime’s story involves a girl who is often absent from school due to domestic issues. The girl has been taking part in the club for two years in which time Miss Lime has seen the “child’s confidence has risen rapidly.” The girl chose herself to join the club when it first began, because the girl likes football. Miss Lime says that other teachers have also commented on “a big difference in the child’s confidence.” She believes this is due to the child enjoying success with the girls’ football team and playing a major role in the team in which her communication with the other members has improved greatly. Miss Lime has given the child extra responsibility in the club and made her vice-captain for matches.

At the same time “Their academic performance has risen steadily and their behaviour is outstanding.”

Miss Lime believes resilience is when someone can recover from a setback or a difficult time in their life. She thinks that the girl now “has confidence that they can complete



and do a certain thing they can take that confidence and apply it to other aspects of their life where they may suffer a setback.”

#### Interview 8

School F is a special education needs school situated in a residential area of a south coast town. The school provides for pupils who have autistic spectrum conditions, communication and associated learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Many also have complex learning difficulties, which include those with moderate, complex, severe, profound or multiple needs. A small minority has a medical treatment protocol in place. The proportion of pupils at the school eligible for the pupil premium (FSM) is above the national average. Miss Beech has been teaching P.E for thirty-six years and in special needs for the past sixteen and extra-curricular for eighteen.

Miss Beech has been teaching P.E for thirty-six years and in special needs for the past sixteen and extra-curricular for eighteen. Miss Beech counts as trying to keep fit her hobby but thinks that at her time in life this is questionable. Summing up the importance of her hobbies she says it has been her life, her career and has affected the holidays taken, educating her children and the relationships in her life. She puts down her early interest in athletics to a teacher at primary school but without her family support she couldn't have done it since the club she then joined wasn't on a bus route and her father became the club transport and secretary. Reflecting on her father's contribution Miss Beech adds "...in teaching, you offer clubs and extra-curricular activities all-singing and all-dancing but unless those children – we can support them within school, but, unless there's a structure to support them out of school, basically they're stuffed.”

The young girl in Miss Beech's story is autistic and is one of the more athletic pupils who enjoys sport. She attends the gym club. The club was free and the child was attending at the time of the interview.

Her parents are supportive and live nearby so collecting her after school isn't a problem. Because of her gym club attendance she has become at school and guides other class mates. The girl has also become a member of the school council since beginning gym club but Miss Beech cannot say if the two are linked.

Miss Beech says that resilience is not discussed much in the school. She believes it to “take things in their stride and you know if you're knocked down you sort of get back up again.”

## Interview 9

School G is situated on the coast in the north of England. The school is rated by Ofsted as requiring improvement. The proportions of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are above average. The number of pupils on the special educational needs register, however, can fluctuate widely during the school year. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is much higher than average

Miss Elm has worked in a school context for five years. She is currently in her third year of teaching and has been at school G for two and a half years. She has been teaching extra-curricular for five years. She says her hobby is learning foreign languages which she considers “massively important” for switching off from the stress of her work “if you don’t have things you can do outside of work you kind of lose who you are.” She says her love of learning languages probably came from her mother’s side of the family being French. She was encouraged to learn their language.

Miss Elm thinks that children can often be misunderstood, and then labelled and forgotten about. She feels that at school she was not supported and “I don’t think I was taught to suit my personality and what I’m like as a learner.”

Miss Elm is the class teacher of the girl she wishes to talk about. She hadn’t been picked up from school one day and so Miss Elm invited her to the Language Club and the girl decided to join. The club was free and the child was attending at the time of the interview.

Since this girl joined the language club their relationship has grown –“I think it allows them to see you as more than just a teacher.”

But there has been a problem because the girl’s parents sometimes on club days turn up to school at 3.15 and take her home or forget to collect her after the club. So her attendance is erratic.

Miss Elm also laments that she does not have another adult to help her run the club since there was such levels of interest “and I ended up, rather than turning the children away, I ended up taking on more children than I’d originally planned because I didn’t want to turn them away, but we couldn’t afford to have another member of staff stay later.”

Since the girl began the club Miss Elm has “noticed a massive change in their behaviour in my class since I started teaching them compared to when they had a different teacher last year and I do think it’s because of the relationship I built with them last year... I think that’s made a massive difference between how they respond to me and how they respond to their learning... I don’t think it was the activity. I think we could have been doing anything at all. I think it was the fact that I was giving up my time after school, which I think

the children value so much, that you're giving up your time to do something with them and I think they just see you in a completely new light." She sees the girl has now an eagerness to learn new words. They are presently doing a Spanish project and the girl is continually running up to her and saying 'What's this in Spanish? How do you say this in Spanish?'

Miss Elm says that it has taught her to judge less quickly pupils just because of their background. She realises that teachers need to get to know their students and the language club has allowed her to do that.

She feels frustrated teaching because "all the paperwork, all the policy-following, all this ticking boxes on forms that we have to do for higher powers, that stops up being the teachers that we joined the profession to be."

She says that the word resilience is used a lot in school G and she believes it means "being mentally strong enough to not give up, despite whatever barriers that may be in your way, that you don't give up, that you do persevere and you see things through to an end and you do that to the best of your ability."

Miss Elm is not sure whether the girl's resilience has improved since attending the club but definitely her confidence and self-esteem have improved.

#### Interview 10

School H is rated by Ofsted as Good in all areas. This is a larger-than-average junior school. Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium is slightly lower than the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs or disability is similar to that found nationally.

Miss Poplar has been teaching for 17 years and has been at school H for the past 2 years. She has been teaching extra-curricular for 17 years.

Miss Poplar believes that she doesn't have time for a hobby, "My main priority now is giving those leisure opportunities to my children who now partake in a really wide range of extra-curricular activities, sporting activities out of school, so for me it's ensuring that they're getting that now, so it's more for them now than for me."

Miss Poplar said that her parents were very keen for her to do lots of different activities. She went to a private school where sports and playing in teams "formed an absolutely fundamental part of my childhood and growing up... so for me it was probably the main part of my childhood was the extra-curricular bit of my schooling." And so remembering her school time she has tries to provide as many different activities as possible

at school H as the budget will allow. “I personally am not able to offer as much extra-curricularly [sic] as I personally would like to.”

Miss Poplar has chosen to talk about a girl who was in her class last year - “she wasn’t very enthusiastic about anything... we’d had some difficulties with mum allowing her to engage in things”

The school set up Change for Life particularly for children who were not engaged in sporting activities, nor had a “broader whole healthy lifestyle...” The club was free, run at lunchtimes and after school, and the child was attending at the time of the interview.

All the teachers selected children that they felt would benefit from being invited to the Change for Life club, “so this child immediately sprang to mind for me ... and was invited to the club and she, she agreed and mum agreed... I remember her coming into me the next day and going, ‘Mrs Lloyd that was amazing! We did all these games, and I was throwing this...’ Over the next few weeks Miss. Poplar saw a change in the girl’s “self-confidence” and in her attitude towards sport in lessons. This was the catalyst for the girl to subsequently join other clubs.

Miss Poplar believes that the girls engagement was sustained because she was given such encouragement and praise by the Year 5 and 6 children who ran the club. Furthermore Miss Poplar believes the girl enjoyed the non-competitive side, and that it was not a classroom setting and she could see that she was making progress.

Miss Poplar says that the girl’s school attendance was “wasn’t always fabulous” but there was an improvement in her attendance, certainly on days the clubs she was attending were running. Miss Poplar believes that as her self-belief grew so her attitude in class in class became more ‘I’ll give it a go and it doesn’t matter if it goes wrong, but I’ll try.’ For Miss Poplar the most lasting legacy of this story is “a child who was always the last to be picked and hung back and to be part of a team and laughing and having fun I think that, that probably was the best moment of all of it and also just showing how important this club is for the children you know who perhaps slip through the net maybe.”

Miss Poplar says that the word resilience is used a lot in school H. Miss Poplar thinks resilience is “being able to keep going when things get a bit tough and not to just bow out but to keep trying and to try and work out different ways to overcome barriers and maybe try and look at different paths and different routes that you can take in order to succeed.” She believes the girls engagement in the club did “strengthen her resilience without any question... [and]completely changed her attitude and her outlook to her work and she was willing to take more time over making things right rather than rushing to get things done...”

## Interview 11

School I is rated Good by Ofsted but outcomes for pupils needs improvement. It is a larger-than-average primary school with more boys than girls attending the school. There are twice as many pupils eligible for free school meals as the national average. The very large majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who have English as an additional language is below the national average. The proportion of pupils who benefit from support for special educational needs or disability is below average. The proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is nearly twice the national average. The community experiences levels of deprivation in the poorest 20% nationally.

Miss Birch is the SENCO at school I. She has been teaching for 27 years and extra-curricular for the same amount of time.

Her hobbies include swimming and photography. She considers these to be “massively important... a space and a place where actually we have some time for us, for our sort of mental health.”

Her love of swimming was triggered in primary school which had a pool and she went on to represent her county in diving... “the reason I got into it was the teachers who led me to it and kept me at it when I was probably wanting to give up or not turn up for practice.”

Miss Birch remembers that feeling of “belonging to a club, having a teacher who knew about me and my interests, so similarly when I run my club, I meet children around the school on a daily basis, we have that thing in common, we talk about books we’re enjoying, we talk about outings we’re going to go on linked to our club, and I can remember that happening for me.”

Miss Birch has chosen a story about a girl who has a chaotic home life because of her mother’s mental health. It is a story she says of the girl’s own resilience and that of the school. The girl walks alone a long way to school. In the winter the staff sometimes drive her home after her club because mum is unable to collect her.

The club was free and the child was attending at the time of the interview. The girl was invited to join the running club which takes place at lunch time.

In the running club she has found an activity which makes her feel good about herself. She wants to please the school “she’s represented the school, she’s represented at county

level... it's been great to see her actually follow the path of her extra-curricular activities and her understanding the impact that's having on all areas of her school life. So sticking with it and not giving up on it I think has been key for her." Miss Birch believes that the running club, which is run at lunch time gives her a different relationship with the staff who run it. "So it's that relationship, but with members of staff across the school: lunchtime staff, PE staff, the Head Teacher. She knows that everyone's rooting for her."

School I talk a lot about resilience and with the children. Miss Birch thinks resilience is "never giving up, even in the face of adversity. It's sticking with something, particularly when it gets hard." Miss Birch says that there is a definite link between her running club engagement and her improved school attendance and "academic attainment and.. just the way she conducts herself around the school, her pride in herself, her appearance, all of that I would say stems from this sort of extra-curricular activity success that she's had..." She wears one of our silver sweatshirts, which is part of our aspirations project, so they have to earn those, and they have to earn them by doing a presentation; they have an appraisal with the head teacher and they have to present what they're going to do throughout the year to be successful. We've just had a sort of keeping in touch meeting, she was awarded her silver sweatshirt, so again she's a role model in our school."

#### Interview 12

Miss Sycamore has been teaching for three years at school I (see interview 11 above for school details). She has taught extra-curricular for three years. She likes promoting maths through a club.

Miss Cherry enjoys baking and sees this hobby as destressing her life. She discovered she liked baking at a club in her primary school. At home her mother also taught her "bits and pieces in the kitchen." She thinks she liked baking because it has an end product which you can share.

School I recently held an Aspirations Week where members of staff were asked to take a school assembly on what they enjoyed doing. Miss Cherry talked about baking "and it was really lovely to be able to show the children something that I enjoyed doing in my own time and help them understand how they could do it in their own time and I also did an assembly based on it where we were talking about not giving up when things go, went wrong, linked to high aspirations, so perseverance."

Miss Cherry has chosen a story about a girl who has a “quite a tricky home life” and requires a good role model from her school life – “she doesn’t have a role model that will help her and give her the opportunities that I would have had as a child. She needs that, that all comes from school for her...” Miss Sycamore talks about all the opportunities she was given by her parents to visit castles etc. “we had such a good childhood, but this particular child doesn’t have those opportunities at home, so it all comes from us at school.”

The girl was invited to join the maths club Double Trouble. The club was free and the child was attending at the time of the interview.

This school club was targeting pupil premium Year 5 children to teach Year 3 children maths, “so we’re targeting those children on purpose to be able to have extra learning time”. Miss Cherry believes “... it was having a responsibility that made her want to come back and help that child have pride and be successful and actually it helped her in her learning as well because she was using the correct language, the mathematical language, she was practising her facts that she needed, so it, it was beneficial to both of them, but yeah, definitely that pride and that responsibility... and her attendance is shocking, really shocking. So um her attendance figures at the moment are at 80%, so really, you know, persistent absence is a big issue, but she would be in school on the days where she had clubs because it was something that she was enjoying doing, so she was never absent for her club days.” Miss Cherry believes that “Academically, her confidence has most definitely improved, just knowing even though in the Maths she was teaching things that were easy for her, she’s now much more confident, you know, hand’s up more in class, being able to talk about things more easily, applying what she’s been teaching the children, the Year Three children, into her own learning.”

The child has subsequently joined the reading club Bookworms which has also helped her literacy and a few sporting clubs such as Cheer Leading and Capture the Flag.

Miss Cherry thinks that the girl’s confidence has grown and her engagement in class since joining these various clubs.

For Miss Cherry “resilience is making a mistake, finding a strategy to get around it and improving it, without just giving up.” She believes the girl can now come up with strategies to help her through her maths.

School J is rated Good in all areas by Ofsted. It is a Middle school in a semi-rural location. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is broadly average. The school has specialised provision for 28 pupils in Years 7 to 11 who have autism. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.

Miss Hazel has been school J's SENCO for 4 years.

She counts tennis and keep fit as her hobbies to "keep me sane!"

Miss Hazel's interest in tennis was triggered by a visiting tennis coach to her lower school who identified "that I had some hand/eye coordination." She has kept her old trainers and given them to "certain pupils because I remember being 'that child' who didn't quite have the kit."

Miss Hazel also remembers "that feeling of being recognised and celebrated for succeeding. I remember that feeling that someone believed in me...tennis gave me that break and chance to show the school I was capable..."

Miss Hazel has chosen to talk about a girl with "various learning difficulties" who was "very scared, lonely and displayed social and communication difficulties."

In order to make her "feel safe" the school "needed to put in a provision to support her needs". The girl was invited to join a lunch time club "Snack 'n' Chat. Miss Hazel believes engagement in this club has "hugely supported this child's soft skills". She is now able to invite friends for a birthday party. Miss Hazel lists a number of other outcomes including gaining confidence to join in class discussions, increasing her reading age from 6 years 11 to 10 years 11 months in one year. Asked to pick out one experience Miss Hazel chooses to highlight how the girl "from not being able to cope with things like netball... to wanting to join the netball team."

#### Interview 14

School K is rated Good by Ofsted in all areas. The school is larger than the average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is lower than average. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups and who speak English as an additional language is lower than average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is lower than average. The proportion who are supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is lower than average.



Miss Laurel has been working in schools for 12 years and at school K for the past 8. Currently she is a Teaching Assistant Level 3 which means she can teach. She started the Gardening Club 8 years ago when her son was at the school after he complained “there wasn't anything for certain children like himself to do with being outdoors. He decided that he wanted an environmental club.” The club meets after school on Mondays but also takes place during school time – “We're part of eco club, eco committee, so we have meetings with governors to let them know what we're doing, we do assemblies, we go out on trips, do all sorts of things really. Anything that's going on that I think might be of interest, we get involved in.”

Miss Laurel counts as her hobbies, gardening, being outside and walking her dog and she considers these activities “really important.”

Miss Laurel thinks we learn better outdoors. She remembers being outdoors all the time when she was a child in the local park “everybody played outside when I was growing up and it was just the thing that you did. You didn't stay indoors.”

Miss Laurel remembers hating literacy until a teacher in her secondary school “introduced me to a different way of thinking about things”. She thinks it's about knowing what type of learner you are visual, auditory or kinaesthetic. She believes most of us are visual learners. She thinks too that learning needs to be fun. She cites taking the children to the beach to learn about the Easter Story and the children “every one of them said this is the best ever. Can we do it again?”

Miss Laurel tells a story about a girl who had never engaged in a school club but joined gardening club in Year 6 because her brother had enjoyed it. “She's always been very quiet, never really spoke to anybody for years and years and years.” She says that the girl is now very proactive and gets involved and comes to her and says regarding the plants outside and says ““Can I go and water them?””

Miss Laurel thinks that the girl's interest was sustained because “it's their club, they decide what they want to do, they come with ideas, they share them and then we decide whether we want to do them” and “because there was an art competition.”

She thinks resilience is the having the skills to sort out a problem and “to keep going”. Miss Alder thinks that the girl has learned transferable skills from gardening which she can apply to other areas of life.

Interviews 15-20 (undergraduate extra-curricular mentors working for Persuade)

Persuade is a registered charity and attempts to draw more people from disadvantaged backgrounds into the legal professions. Schools contact Persuade to set up and mentor a Debating Society. The cost is £3600 and schools contribute between £500 and £2000 dependent upon the number of FSM children. Persuade run a core programme in schools with an above national average of FSM children. The mentors are selected from undergraduates. The children in these following six stories were chosen by their schools to participate in Persuade.

#### Interview 15

Miss Willow has been a Persuade mentor for two and a half years. She likes to sing and play the piano. She believes these hobbies keep her “sane”.

Miss Willow says that her parents were keen for her to do music at school and also she had a great music teacher who gave them time at lunch times to practice. She remembers the energy and respect of her teachers and the encouragement “to do things and facilitate you... and I learnt over the years of being a mentor that that’s actually the most key thing, engaging children is respecting them and just like when they find something exciting, run with it and because my teachers did that with music.”

She has chosen to talk about a boy who has “a slight speech impediment, which when you do public speaking can be quite intimidating. I think English isn’t the main language spoken at home.” She says that he was initially very shy but “from being a little bit apprehensive about speaking to always having his hand up, um, like glowing after he speaks. Very, very confident now.” Miss Willow says that he has also become interested in current affairs. She says he has acted very positively to feedback, especially positive feedback “I think getting that kind of praise, you don’t realise how much of a big impact it has on children until you watch them, like, glow for the next half an hour because they’ve done something, like, really good... that’s really stood out for me, the fact that you telling someone they’ve done well and, like, facilitating them doing well has such an impact on how they feel about themselves and how they feel for the rest of the time, that’s really positive.” Miss Willow says that the praise has to be genuine, because children recognise when it is not and the praise has to be for something that occurred that the practitioner noticed an improvement. In the case of this child when he started receiving genuine praise he stopped being hyperactive.

For Miss Willow resilience is about getting back up again after a defeat. She says he debating club discuss this a lot, especially after defeats in competitions. How to do better next time and learn from their mistakes. She thinks the boy's resilience has strengthened "one hundred percent" since participating in Persuade.

#### Interview 16

Miss Cedar is a program director with Persuade. She has also been mentoring for a year.

Miss Cedar says that she doesn't have any hobbies she can think of. She remembers one particular History teacher who made the subject "engaging" by bringing in artefacts like a gas mask when they were studying World War One and "just how interested and involved she was in the students." She tries to emulate this involvement and enthusiasm when she mentors.

Miss Cedar talks about the children being obliged to take part in the debating club so to be "as positive as possible... and they get really excited at the beginning of every session. They'd always come in, give me a hug, and sort of, 'Oh, [Miss Cedar's] here, Persuade's here!'

The key was pointing out how much they had improved and giving them "constructive feedback" and showing "This is how you progress". Miss Cedar begins each session with some food for the children which they would share and "take a little bit more of a laid back approach". She would try and not make the students daunted by the subject of their debate and they'd say "I don't know how to do this" she would tell them to break it down into smaller bits.

She thinks the children were excited to see her each week because she didn't work at the school, she was "an outsider".

She speaks about her debating group being very disappointed because a trip to the Houses of Parliament was cancelled and the kids thought this as just typical.

Miss Cedar speaks of one child with particular behaviour issues who responded well to being given a difficult task and "responsibility" because she told the boy "I know that you can do this."

For Miss Cedar resilience is "the ability and the maturity to cope with setbacks and cope with criticism, um, constructive criticism... and move forward... positively."

## Interview 17

Mr. Alder has been a Persuade mentor for two years.

He considers his hobbies to include debating, music and dance. “I think my hobbies have been what have really shaped most of my identity... my hobbies have really been the way I’ve interacted with the world.”

Mr. Alder said he liked extra-curricular activities because the rewards were more instantaneous whereas school work always seemed like you were working for something in the far future. In drama “I always got to see the immediate results of my work.” Mr Alder says that “a lot of my mentor, my approach as a mentor to children has been based on what I think works for me as the kid... having really achievable and clear goals.” He believes too that the goals must not be in several years’ time but just around the corner like the next debating competition.

Mr. Alder is frustrated with the shortage of time he has with his class and the numbers of students. He would prefer working with just six or eight students and for more than an hour.

Mr. Alder’s story is about a boy he remembers being “really angry” and recognising that “they’re incredibly bright and they have loads of potential but I can see Education’s failing them”. Mr. Yew thought he could relate to the boy. He remembers his childhood in Hackney and not having anything in common with his middle-class teachers. In Persuade “the students felt I took them seriously so they took themselves seriously. And I think that’s what we were able to do which mainstream education often doesn’t”. Mr. Alder mentions a game they played in the first session. The boy was timid and he had to talk about why boxing should be banned “at that point he was quite nervous but we got through it and he to articulate that idea”. It was a game whereby if you changed someone’s point of view they could change sides. After the boy spoke two people changed onto his side... “that was a really big moment because you don’t get, you don’t really get that in school.” Mr. Alder could tell that the boy had good ideas but he couldn’t articulate them. “...it was just about really making sure I talked to him as an individual. Um, I think a lot of what a mentor is recognising what people need... I realised, he still wasn’t putting up his hand, but he, if I ever asked him, he stopped struggling.”

Mr. Alder remembers the big rivalries between the local primary schools when he was growing up. Mr. Alder thinks competition “not just healthy but could be quite empowering.”

Although the boys team initially lost three out of four debates he was singled out for the reason they won one debate. The boy went from being too shy to put up his hand to being consulted by his peers. Then they won the next two debates. Mr. Alder thinks the boy began to think ‘I really do have a voice and... when I speak, people listen’ and his teacher in school said that he was contributing more in class. Then he was voted president of the debating club. The boy has persuaded other children to get involved in debating.

For Mr. Alder resilience “isn’t just about like learning how to build an umbrella when it’s raining but actually learning how to dance and live again in the rain and be okay and thrive in that environment.” He believes the boy has become more resilient through competition – “learning how to deal with failure I think is really important to a child’s development and being resilient.”

#### Interview 18

Miss Holly has been a Persuade mentor for one year. She considers debating (she is part of her university debating committee) and sports in general to be her hobbies. These activities are “very important.” Her debating she says helped her master English (she is from the Czech Republic) and to study Law. It was someone coming to her school and talking about all the possibilities of travelling and increasing knowledge that got Miss Holly interested “you explore maybe subjects that you wouldn’t have otherwise so... that really got me into debating.”

Miss Holly talks about her frustration with only having one hour per week to work with her debating group.

Miss Holly has chosen a story about a girl who “was really shy at the beginning and kind of didn’t want to participate.” She thinks this girl reacted well to feedback. “... a good thing that Debate makes us is that when we’re giving feedback we always try to find out, always try to kind of draw attention to kids that improved or that made some kind of progress, so I tried to do that with her... so kids are, kids really notice that when you kind of give them praise in front of everyone so they’re like, she became more motivated because I noticed that she was improving...”

Miss Holly thinks that resilience is “to continue with what you are doing even though you fail...”

She believes the girl has resilience because unlike some children who became less motivated when they lost competitions she responded to feedback and improved and “was then awarded the most progressed child in the whole London Urban Debate League.”

## Interview 19

Mr. Hawthorn has been a Persuade mentor for three years.

At secondary school he enjoyed coaching rugby to the younger boys and he still returns occasionally to his primary school to teach Chinese and French. He considers Persuade and coaching rugby as his hobbies which are “Very important... your hobbies feel part of you.”

Remembering how interest was triggered in his childhood Mr. Hawthorn says “...to be able to spark an interest and maintain an interest there has to be opportunity to continue with that interest.” He later adds “ I think the main thing to sustaining interest would be to keep giving them an opportunity to work up or work to something different. If you stagnate, things start to become less interesting So the key to keeping people invested in something is to keep giving them opportunities.”

He mentions the word competition several times in keeping interest “in Persuade there’s constant mention of a competition ... we’re building towards this competition... then they have the competition, it usually goes very well, they’ll enjoy it, they’ll come back very excited and then you’re talking about the next competition... so I think it’s constantly building towards something in the future that they can actually see, that they’re participating in and getting something out of it. There’s a reward in the end and that reward is sort of recognition of how much you’ve learnt throughout the process.”

Mr. Hawthorn talks about a girl who was in danger of being excluded from school for bad behaviour and was selected for Debate Mate. Her team lost the first debate but they won the second round and she was instrumental in the team’s win. She was then chosen to be team captain. “she’s a perfect representation of what the programme [Debate Mate] is trying to achieve at some children that don’t necessarily engage in the same way [in the classroom] as other students do.”

Mr. Hawthorn thinks the girl has prospered by doing things, rather than static learning, and in fun ways. “... often the fun things are the things that teach you the most because you get up, you do a speech out loud for a couple of minutes, you’re not writing down how to do a speech, you’re doing it and actually you’ve overcome that obstacle and actually the next time you do it you’re not worried that you have to speak in a minute out loud, so yeah, I feel there’s a massive part of learning by doing.”

Mr. Hawthorn would like to see (as an experiment) how many children, like this girl, who are not engaging in traditional classroom learning would benefit from a week's Persuade.

He talks about levels of "self-esteem". He says in week one "people aren't really sure about giving me their opinion... week two you encourage them more, week three you encourage them more and then by week four, five, six, they're starting to give their opinions and they're happier doing that and they're more forceful... and once you've shown them that actually their opinion is valued, they've got something to contribute to the debate, they've got something to contribute to society, to the classroom, then they've got much more self-esteem..."

Mr. Hawthorn talks about resilience as "You've overcome adversity, you've overcome a defeat, you've gone on to then win based on the feedback you've been given, that then works as an example for everything."

#### Interview 20

Miss Maple has been working as a Persuade mentor for two years.

She talks about "getting involved" with several extra-curricular activities in her primary and secondary schools. She considers dance, piano and drama as her hobbies. She believes them to be "Really important!" Drama provides her with a social life, dance "connects me to my background" and piano is "fun." She says the main influence in getting her into these activities was "definitely just my mum... mum pushed me to start them and she pushed me to not stop." She would drive her an hour to do piano lessons when they moved house. Drama was also triggered in primary school when she did a performance and loved it and then started getting really involved in activities.

Miss Maple highlights the social aspect of her hobbies, especially the social circle she has formed in drama, and how she tries to get her Persuade pupils to make friends. She thinks that Debating can actually be dull and that the kids that drop out "don't really form attachments to any other she massively changed. She came back from that and I think she saw maybe why she should be doing it." Miss Maple has chosen to talk about a girl whose teacher said "she doesn't talk, she doesn't interact. If you push her to talk, she will just freeze and then walk out the room. She will just not interact with you." Miss Maple adds "So debating, you'd think, is the exact opposite of what would be helpful for her [but] its now..."

she's one of the first to put up her hand ... and the transformation of her is something that I hope, at least, is due to debating and the club that she's still with." Miss Willow said that the girl didn't talk for the first six months "...it was like actually she just didn't want to be there." Miss Maple thinks it was the debating competition in the Houses of Parliament that was the trigger to her transformation "...she massively changed. She came back from that and I think she saw maybe why she should be doing it... but I think she just saw more of a use to what she was doing." She would occasionally come up to Miss Maple with an idea and Miss Maple was aware she was dealing with a young girl who had hitherto been reluctant to speak. Her tactic was to be "incredibly encouraging... And at the beginning I made sure I put her on sides she agreed with, so I thought putting her on a side that she disagreed with was a little bit too far for now..."

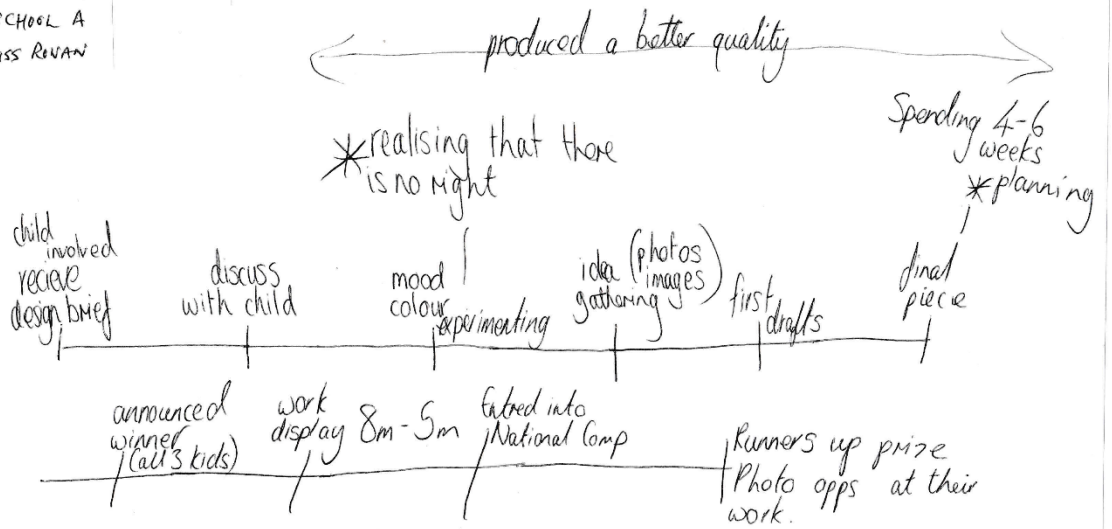
Miss Maple regrets just having an hour a week with her group as the first fifteen minutes is spent trying to get them back to where they were the week before. Her increased enthusiasm and engagement in Persuade has not been seen in the classroom. Miss Maple thinks that perhaps the girl has found "better friends" in Persuade than she has formed in her classroom.

Miss Maple believes resilience is "the ability to bounce back."

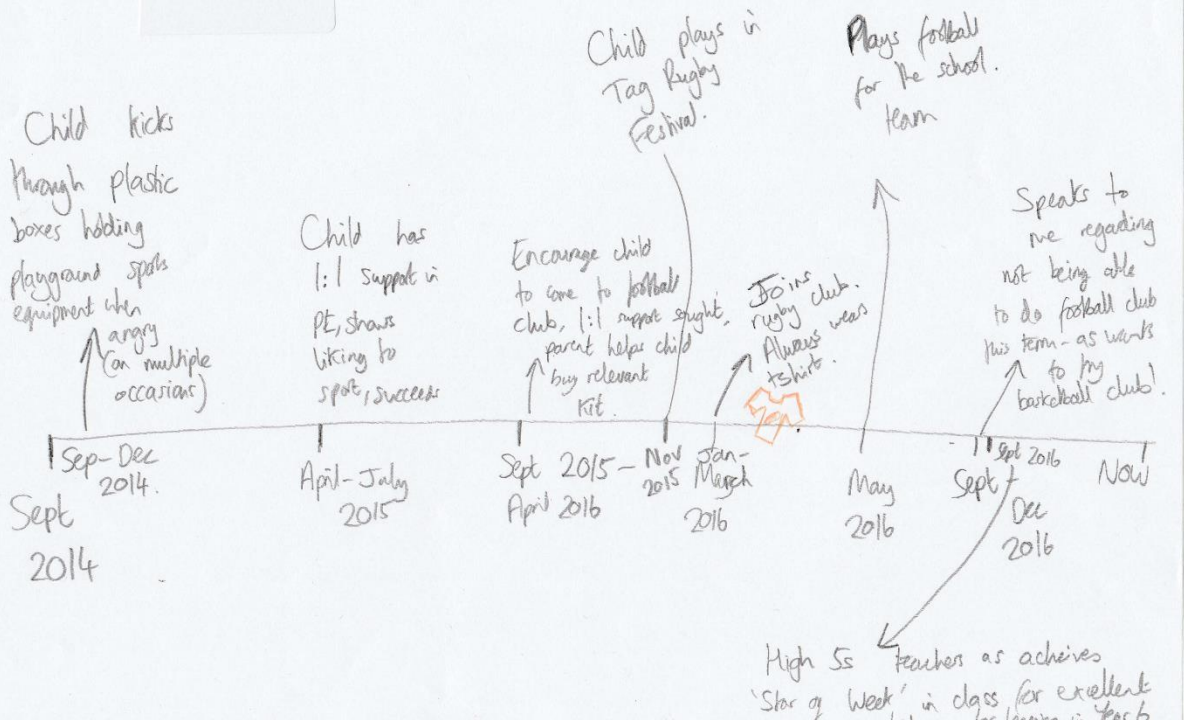


## Appendix Eight

INTERVIEW 1  
SCHOOL A  
MISS REVAN



INTERVIEW 2  
SCHOOL A  
MR YEW



INTERVIEW 3  
SCHOOL B  
MISS ALDER

class changes	Home problems	Anger management	taken into care	Timetable changes
Jan 2016	Feb 2016	March 2016	May 2016	June 2016
class day project	new skills	Design + Technology week Environmental project problem Solving	After school clubs	1:1 intervention Art
				July 2016
				UCL Exhibition Art work displayed
				Sept 2016
				Nominated for Arts award

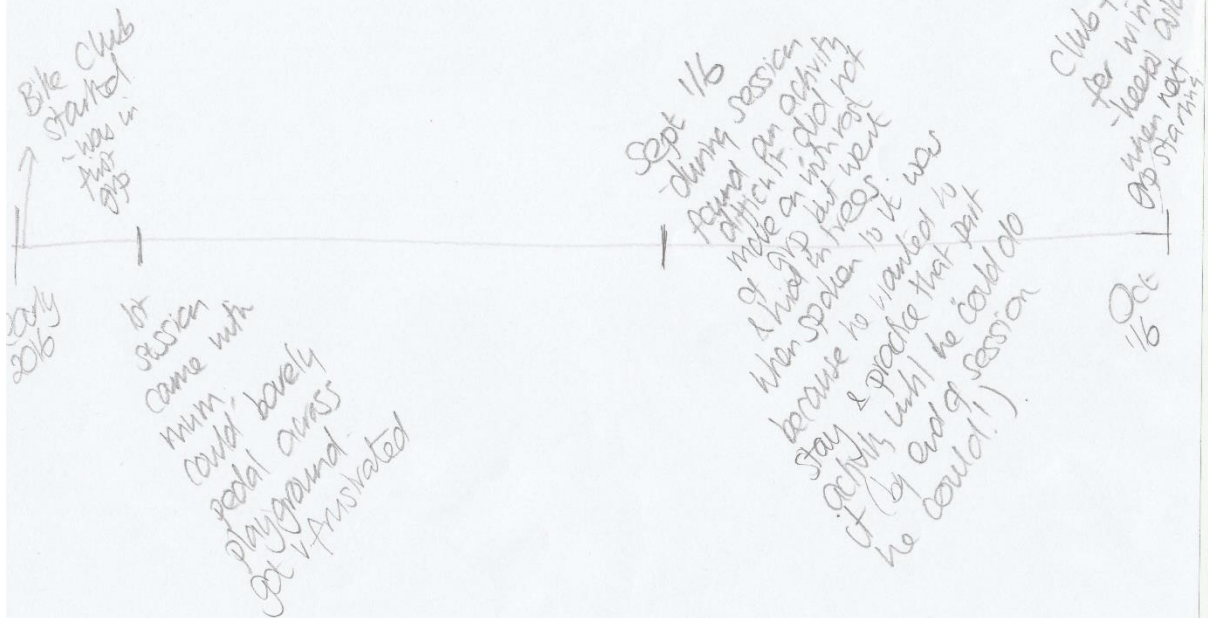
## INTERVIEW 4

SCHOOL B

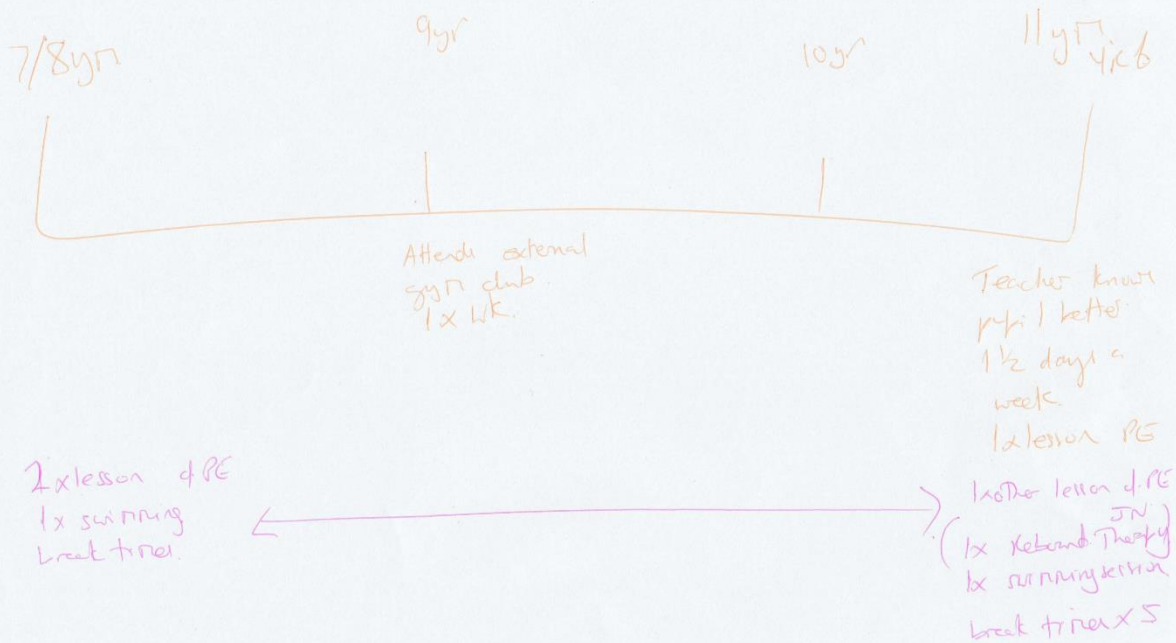
MR. ASH

Timeline	Issues / Constraints / Successes.
Sept ' 2015	Little rapport with YP. Honeymoon period but anxieties and behaviours began to creep out.
Oct ' 2015	After school provision fully operating. YP <del>is</del> keen to access. Behaviours preventing access.
Nov ' 2015	Staff adopting consistent strategies and clear expectations highlighted for YP.
Dec ' 2015	PE attendance v. good and inspired to partake more. Starting to access clubs as strategies began having impact.
Jan '16 - July '16	Regular club attendee. Good leader. But managing anger in competitive scenarios still a concern. Improved throughout Ac. Year.
Sept ' 16	Home life changed dramatically. Taken into care. Difficulties returned. Clubs and positive relationships with significant others helping to control incidences from escalating.
Oct '16	YP felt secure and safe enough in school which brought serious/significant "blow-outs" which resulted in exclusion.
Nov '16	Returned from repeated exclusion :- holding on to WUHL club - WUHLFC coach - looking forward to sessions and is focused on trying to control/manage own behaviour to access this opportunity.

INTERVIEW 6  
SCHOOL D  
MISS SYCAMORE



INTERVIEW 8  
SCHOOL F  
MISS BEECH





INTERVIEW 9  
SCHOOL 9  
MISS ELM

Beginning  
Oct. 2015

Child joined  
Dec. 2015

Jan. 2016  
Child  
began to miss  
sessions.

taken into  
care. May. 2016

child left  
at club, not  
picked up.  
Feb. 2016.

Regular  
attendance at club

joined my  
class.

Nov. 16. 17

INTERVIEW 10  
SCHOOL H  
MISS POPLAR

Improvement in attitude  
in class → development  
in self-belief  
+ more effort  
in improving own  
work.

Jan → March  
Children invited  
to Change4Life  
Club - Towns  
children.  
Child invited  
+ Mum says  
Yes!

Lacking self-  
confidence.  
Hindered by  
MUM  
↑  
Child joined  
class.

Dec 2016  
MUM writes  
note to say  
she does  
not want  
child participating  
in 'Stafford Mile'  
Child upset + does  
Star Jumps for the  
entire duration  
of the Mile!

Sept  
2016

Child then chose to  
participate in at least  
one or 2 after school  
clubs → cricket +  
athletics during  
Summer Term.

INTERVIEW 11  
SCHOOL I  
MISS BIRCH

started school  
|  
May 2015  
Attendance  
at previous  
school  
73%.

Gold Medal in  
Town Sports.  
|  
May 2016  
She was picked  
for Town Sports.  
New Sports leader  
raised profile of  
Cross Country in school.  
PSA began work with  
mum.

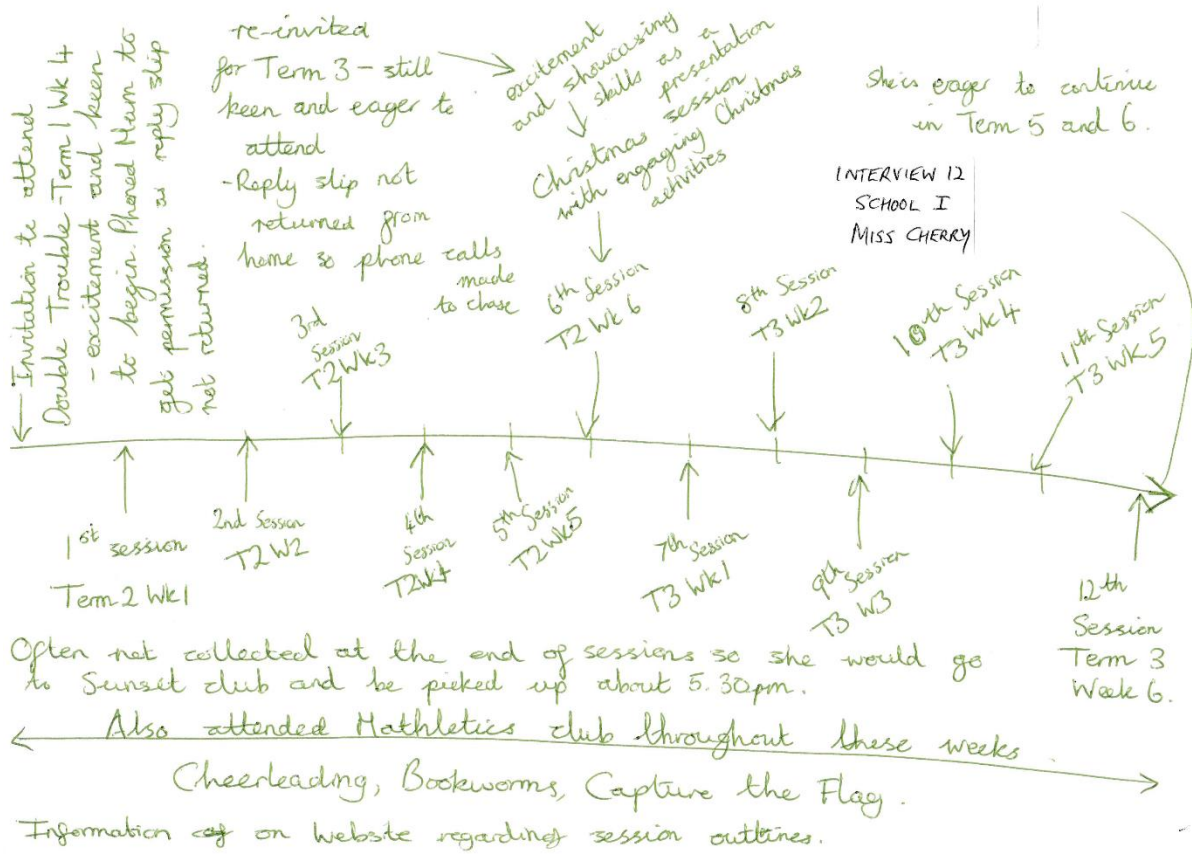
She joined  
Cross Country Club.  
|  
SEP 2017  
Mum began  
talking into school  
as  
Reading Champion.  
Openly discussed  
mental health.

But mum  
didn't take her!  
Worry is how will  
she progress without  
our support.

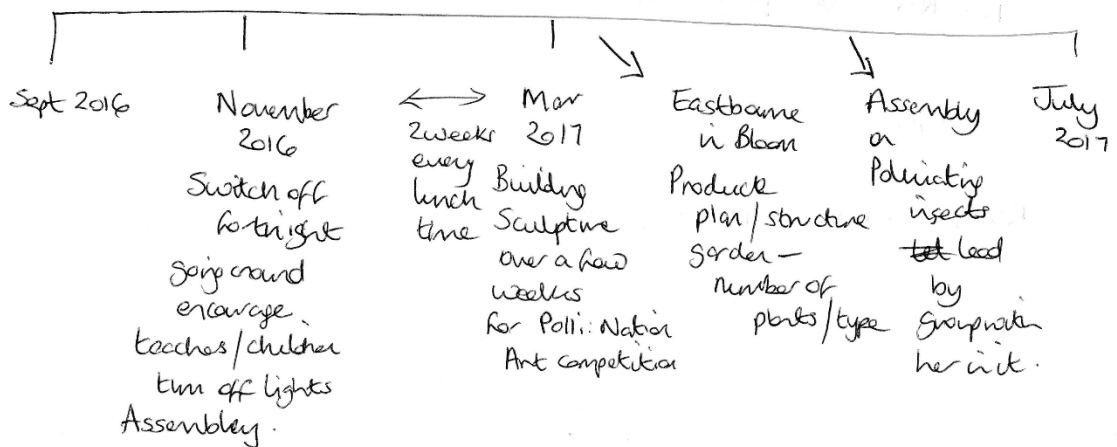
(3 pupils qualify  
for county finals)

Dec  
qualified for  
County finals.  
|  
March  
2017  
Attendance  
96%.

New  
she came  
talkin over  
Cross country

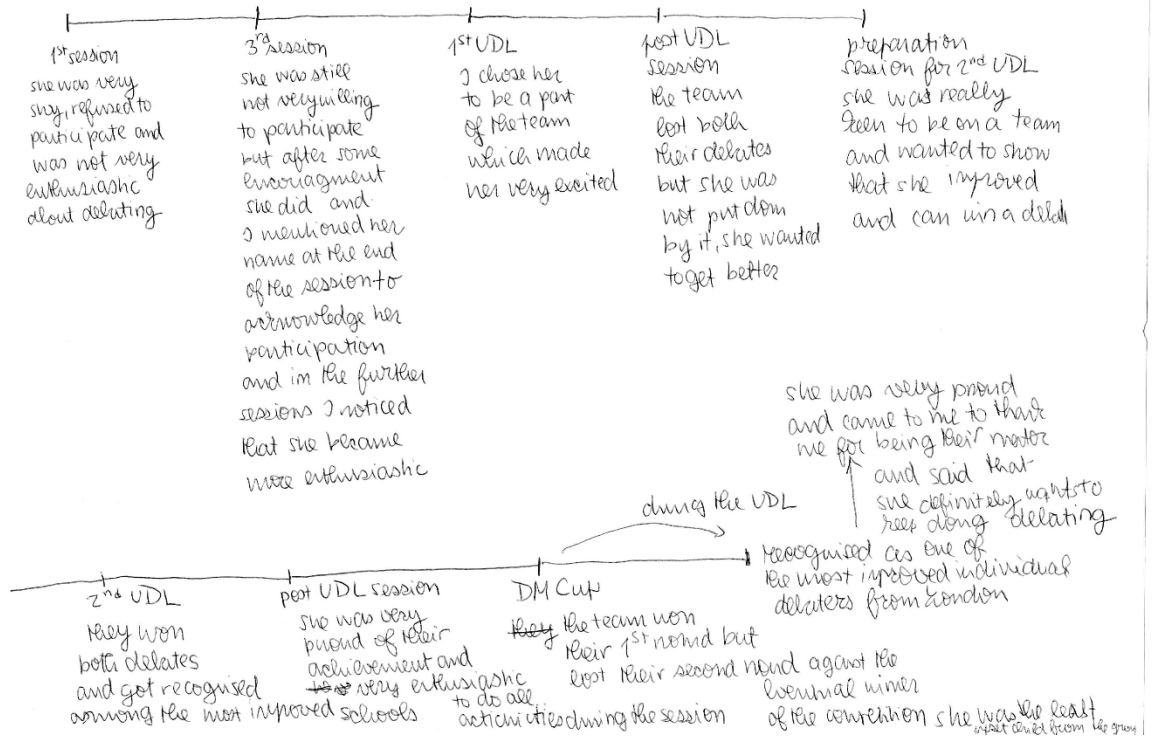


INTERVIEW 14  
SCHOOL K  
MISS LAUREL

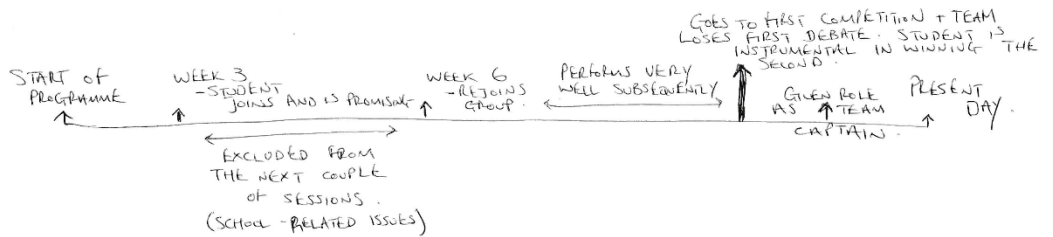




INTERVIEW 18  
Miss Holly



INTERVIEW 19  
MR. HAWTHORN





INTERVIEW 20  
MISS MAPLE

