Disengagement from education among 14-16 year olds

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Introduction

It is estimated that between one fifth and one third of all young people aged 14-16 are disengaged from education. This has well documented implications for the young person and the wider society, including poor labour market opportunities and the risk of being not in education, employment or training (NEET). Other associated negative outcomes are teenage pregnancy and drug use. Engagement is crucial because of recent legislation raising the participation age for education, first to 17 by the year 2013, and then 18 by 2015.

Using data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE), the researcher carried out a quantitative analysis of disengagement from education among 14-16 year olds. They identified four different kinds of engagement and explored when as well as why some young people disengaged.

The study will be of interest to teachers, leaders, parents and policy makers wishing to explore the issue of disengagement amongst 14-16 year olds.   In particular it will help them consider the factors contributing to disengagement and the strategies which might help to encourage continued engagement in school.

Keywords:
England, Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4, Secondary schools, pupils, teachers, parent school, parental involvement, extracurricular activities, transition, aspirations, motivation, teacher-pupil relationships, attainment, disaffection

Contents

Which young people were engaged or disengaged?

The study is a nationally representative survey designed to follow a single cohort of young people aged from 14 -25 and was begun in 2004. 15,000 young people were interviewed and the researcher defined four general types of engaged or disengaged young people from the pattern of their responses.

1. 'Engaged' young people, who were highly engaged with school and aspired to continue with fulltime education and to degree level. They represented 40% in Year 9, 33% in Year 10 and 34% in Year 11.
2. Young people who were 'disengaged from school not education'. They disliked school and were more likely to skip classes, but otherwise aspired to continue with fulltime education to degree level. They represented 23% of young people in Year 9, 26% in Year 10, and 25% of young people in Year 11.
3. Young people who were 'engaged with school not higher education'. They were generally positive about school and aspired to continue with education or

training in Year 12, but not higher education. They represented 25% of young people in Year 9 and 22% in Year 10 and 11.

4. 'Disengaged' young people who had much lower aspirations, disliked school and were far more likely to play truant. They represented 12% of young people in Year 9, 19% in Year 10, and 20% in Year 11.

Most young people were already engaged or disengaged by the time they were in Year 9 and remained so throughout the last three years of compulsory schooling. However 14 per cent disengaged or further disengaged in Year 10.

There was also very little evidence of young people re-engaging over the period.

What are the impacts of disengagement on qualification and destination post Key stage 4?

- Most of the 'engaged' young people (87 %) achieved Level 2 at Key Stage 4 (5 GCSE's graded A-C).

- Those 'disengaged from school not higher education' did almost as well with 71 % achieving at this level.

- For young people 'engaged with school not higher education', the picture was a little different as only 40% of this group achieved Level 2 although most still achieved Level 1 (5 GCSE's graded A-G).

- For the 'disengaged', less than 20% achieved the Level 2 benchmark, but more importantly over a third of this group left school with few or no qualifications at all.

One of the greatest predictors of successful destinations is achievement at Key Stage 4 and the pattern of destinations followed this pattern.

- Most of the 'engaged' (95%) and 'disengaged from school but not education' (85%) followed their intentions and continued with full time education.

- Most of the young people 'engaged with school but not higher education' also continued with full time education (63%) or were employed in a job with training (16%).

- Among the 'disengaged ', one fifth were in a job without training and slightly over a quarter were classified as not in education, employment or training (NEET).

What factors helped or hindered engagement?

Working with parents
The importance of the relationship between schools and parents was key as where there was evidence of a more positive relationship with parents; young people were more likely to be engaged with school, but also with education in the longer term. This relationship was

supported through providing parents with information on how the young person was getting on, and ways that they, as parents, could help in their child's education.

Information and Guidance

Another factor identified within the study was the importance of providing young people with good information about the pathways that are available to them in Year 12 and especially the kind of qualifications they will need to achieve them. 'Disengaged' young people were especially likely to want a job that paid well, yet they were not especially likely to recognise the importance of working hard at school to achieve this goal.

Study support and homework supervision

Attending additional teacher-led classes in preparation for exams, simple 'drop in' classes where young people could study on their own or with friends, or attending classes in the school holidays were all associated with a reduced risk of disengagement. Low supervision of homework by teachers and parents was identified as an important factor behind 'disengaged' young people.

Relationships with teachers

Relationships that young people have with their teachers can be critical to a young person's engagement. It was thought that if teachers were able to foster positive relationships where pupils felt they were being fairly treated and given appropriate praise, this would contribute to the degree of engagement.

Bullying

There was also clear association between being bullied in the last 12 months and disengaging from school.

Curriculum and extracurricular activity

There was some indication in the study that providing a more varied programme of vocational options could help engage young people as the disengaged group were more likely to feel confident and enjoy studying Information, Communication and Technology and non traditional academic subjects. Making sports facilities available for young people to use outside of lessons, and providing a variety of school clubs and societies also reduced the risk of disengagement.

School factors

The amount of truancy that occurs within a school can have an impact on that school's culture of engagement. Young people are more likely to be 'engaged with school not higher education' or 'disengaged' in schools with greater levels of truancy. Thus, not only does truancy impact on those who play truant, it might also impact on the educational engagement of other young people within the same school.

Conclusions – Who is most at risk of disengaging?

Those most at risk of disengagement were white, males, and young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

'Disengaged from school not education'

Those most likely to disengage from school but remain committed to education were Black Caribbean and young people with a Mixed background, whereas Indian, Pakistani, and Black African young people were the least likely to disengage from school. Young people whose father (or mother if no father figure was present) had never worked or were long term unemployed were a at slightly greater risk of disengaging from school, as were those living in a step or single parent family.

'Engaged with school not higher education'

Young people who were at most likely to be engaged with school not higher education were white, male, with a father (or mother if no father figure was present) employed in a routine or manual occupation, and a mother with a low education. Young people whose father was in an intermediate occupation, or who had never worked or was long term unemployed, were also more at risk, as were those who lived in a step or single parent family.

'Disengaged'

Young people who were at most risk of disengaging from education and school were again, White males (they were especially unlikely to be Indian, Pakistani, or Black African). Young people whose father (or mother if no father figure was present) was in a routine or manual occupation or who had never worked or was long term unemployed, and whose mothers had a low education were most at risk of disengaging. Although less so, young people whose fathers were in intermediate occupations were also more at risk.

Aim – What was the researcher trying to find out?

The researcher set out to identify a typology of engaged and disengaged young people using information on young people's behaviour, attitudes and motivations as measured in the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England. This segmentation enabled a closer examination of the factors involved and therefore the steps to address the issue. Teachers may find it helpful to look at the measures for attitudes to school used in the survey which can be found in Appendix B of the report.

The key questions which the study sought to address were:

- What are the main types of engaged/disengaged young people in England, and what proportion of young people do they represent?
- Do these 'types' of engaged/disengaged young people remain stable between Years 9-11, or is there evidence that new or different types develop over time?
- Do young people remain at the same level of engagement throughout Years 9-11, or is there evidence that they become more or less engaged?
- Is there a critical year at which young people are more likely to become more engaged or disengaged?
- What are the implications of a young person's disengagement for their Key Stage 4 qualifications and future outcomes?
- What factors are important for predicting whether someone is likely to be disengaged?

- What factors are important for promoting their engagement?

Implications of the study

In completing this digest the authors began to ask the following questions about implications for practitioners:

- Participation in study support and close supervision of homework helped with a young person's engagement as did the quality of relationship with their teachers. Can you consider ways in which you could offer a range of flexible support opportunities for young people who easily fall behind with coursework and who may have limited parental support?
- The research found that the relationship with parents was a key factor in promoting engagement. Think about the way you communicate with parents about their child's achievements e.g. at parent's evenings and written communication such as reports. Are there opportunities to raise awareness to parents of the significance of their involvement and aspirations?

School leaders might like to consider some of the following implications:

- Year 10 represented a critical point for disengagement where young people started their Key Stage 4 qualifications; a transition that some young people found more difficult than others. Starting new courses, young people may be split up from established friendship groups. The increase in the volume and the significance of coursework might also prove a little too much for some. Do you have procedures in school monitoring young people's progress which pay particular attention during this period? Surely this is one for school leaders.

- Is clear guidance and information available about pathways which are available to young people in Year 12? The study showed that disengaged young people were often not aware of the importance of qualifications and that a minimum number of GCSEs were required for most college courses, work-based learning settings and 'decent' jobs. Is the information conveyed to young people in Year 9 before they start their GCSEs?
- There were some indications that opportunities for studying outside of school and taking vocational subjects could improve engagement. In what ways can the changes to the 14-19 curriculum and the diploma system be directed towards increasing engagement?

Where can I find out more?

Other digests
Praising the person or what they do - do different types of praise have different effects on pupils' motivation
http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/research/themes/Motivation/praise/

What is the effect of after school provision on children's academic performance and motivation?
http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/research/themes/inclusion/afterschool/

Managing institutional and personal transitions – developing the work in schools
http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/research/themes/transition/FriMay211010222004/

Other research

Research for Teachers (RfT) Parental Involvement
http://www.gtce.org.uk/teachers/rft/parent0206/

Research for teachers (RfT) Alternative Curriculum
http://www.gtce.org.uk/teachers/rft/alt_prov0105/