

Inter-Life and Transition Skills for young Looked After and Accommodated Children (LAAC): Barriers and Facilitators to the engagement of atypical Learners

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Background/ Aim

- Previous work documented the importance of pupil led research. Several policy initiatives have been designed to capture the voice of the child (Clarke 2005).
- Previous work with young people in Care documented the challenges involved in gaining access and sustaining the research population (Heptinstall 2000; Pirrie and Macleod, 2009).
- Aim of the Inter-Life Research Project is to help young people who are Looked After or Accommodated (LAAC) to develop life transition skills using an online, 3-dimensional, immersive and multi-modal learning environment, based on the Second Life™ platform.
- Present study is based on inclusion and the affordances of Technology Enhanced Learning as a vehicle for young people who may be deemed "atypical" learners.

Methods

- Framed within the social constructivist paradigm drawn from Wenger's community of practice (Wenger, 1998).
- Mixed-methods adopted (De Laat and Lally, 2003) however this part of the study draws on a series of semi-structured research interviews with key stakeholders in the partner Local Authority (LA).
- Forum Theatre approach (alignment with inclusion) as a stimulus/ recruitment event to encourage marginalised groups to devise creative ideas to issues that are important in their lives (Boal, 1992).

References

- Clarke A (2005) The Voice of Children and Young People. Glasgow, HeadsUp Scotland.
<http://www.headsupscotland.co.uk/documents/ParticipationDiscussionDocument.pdf>
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 Heptinstall E (2000): Gaining Access to Looked After Children for Research Purposes: Lessons Learned. *British Journal of Social Work* (2000): 30: 867-872.
 Wenger E (1998). *Communities of Practice: learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge: University Press.
 De Laat MF, Lally V (2003) Complexity, theory and praxis; researching collaborative learning and tutoring processes in a networked learning community. *Instructional Science* 31: 7-39.
 Boal A (1992) *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (London. Routledge).

Life Transition Skills



Results: Facilitators to engagement

- Reciprocal relationships of trust between the university researchers and partners within LA Social Services.
- Clear communication with partners; Educational Psychologists, Heads of Social Services, Managers in Children's Houses, LA ICT personnel, Social Workers and Foster Carers.
- Understanding that research community involves ownership by all of the partners/ gatekeepers.
- Partner stakeholder's understanding of the importance of the technology as a new resource for young people who are in Care.
- Time invested by the researchers in terms of Ethics and Internet security to ensure the safety of the young people involved.
- Establishing a strategic steering group to manage the ongoing partnership work.
- Creative use of a Forum Theatre Expressive Arts-based Stimulus/ Recruitment event.

Results: Barriers to engagement

- Negotiating access through layers of LA personnel involved in the care of vulnerable young people.
- LA personnel's conflict between understanding the benefit of the project versus their concerns (fears) about internet safety.
- No internet access in the Children's Houses. Laptops issued to Foster Carers did not have suitable graphics capabilities.