

An independent study of the impact of a writing exercise on the academic attainment of disadvantaged children in England

Submission date 01/05/2016	Recruitment status No longer recruiting	☐ Prospectively registered ☒ Protocol
Registration date 06/05/2016	Overall study status Completed	☒ Statistical analysis plan ☒ Results
Last Edited 09/08/2022	Condition category Other	☐ Individual participant data

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

There is a general belief that young peoples' life chances can be improved by altering their self-concept and self-belief. The theory is that individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds can be stigmatised by their background and face a negative stereotype regarding their academic achievement. The 'Writing About Values' intervention seeks to reverse this negative stereotype by getting these individuals to write about positive statements or values important to them. The theory is that the writing activity gives pupils a sense of value, alleviating negative feelings associated with their perceptions of themselves. A number of studies, most of which are conducted in the US, suggest that this approach has been successful in overcoming negative stereotype and improving the grades of traditionally disadvantaged groups like the African American and Latino American students. So far no large-scale robust studies have been conducted in the UK that look into the impact of this writing activity on the academic outcomes of disadvantaged children. This study will be the first in the UK to test the causal effect of the writing activity on academic attainment.

Who can participate?

All Year 10 and Year 11 pupils from 25 secondary schools in the South-East of England

What does the study involve?

Pupils are randomly allocated into two groups. Those in the treatment group are given an exercise booklet in which they write about values that are important to them. Those in the control group are given an alternative writing exercise, which could be writing about values that are not important to them but may be important to others. It has been suggested that this intervention is most effective when implemented just before a stressful event. Therefore, these writing exercises are delivered three times a year, once at the beginning of the academic year, once before the mock GCSEs and once just before the GCSEs.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

All participating schools will receive an incentive payment of £1,000 for completing the study. There are no particular risks of participation since this activity will be presented as part of a regular English language classroom activity.

Where is the study run from?

Durham University, School of Education (UK)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?

July 2015 to December 2019

Who is funding the study?

Education Endowment Foundation (UK)

Who is the main contact?

Dr Beng Huat See

Contact information

Type(s)

Public

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Study information

Scientific Title

A randomised controlled trial to test the causal effect of writing about personal values on the academic attainment of Year 10 and Year 11 pupils (aged 14 to 16) in England

Study objectives

The theory behind this intervention is that people who belong to groups that are typically seen as underachieving are aware of the negative stereotype associated with them. This can lead to anxiety and low self-concept, which in turn can reduce learning and motivation. The belief is that getting pupils to write about their personal values can alleviate negative feelings and overcome stereotype threat. Research evidence in the US suggests that the writing activity has positive effects on improving the grades of underachieving African American and Latino American students, but had no impact on white students, thus narrowing the achievement gap.

Research questions:

1. What impact does the "Writing About Values" activity have on the academic attainment of disadvantaged pupils (EverFSM) using the individual pupil's Attainment 8 measure at GCSE after one year of treatment (for initial Y11)?
2. Is there a sustained impact of the "Writing About Values" activity on the Attainment 8 measure at GCSE for EverFSM pupils a year after the end of the intervention? (for initial Y10)
3. What impact does the "Writing About Values" activity have on all pupils (EverFSM and non-EverFSM) using the individual pupil's Attainment 8 measure at GCSE after one year of treatment? (for initial Y11)
4. Is there a sustained impact of the "Writing About Values" activity on the Attainment 8 measure at GCSE for all pupils (EverFSM and non-EverFSM) a year after the end of the intervention? (for initial Y10)
5. Is there a sustained impact of the "Writing About Values" activity on pupil's self-reported non-attainment outcome one year after the end of the intervention?

Ethics approval required

Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)

Primary study design

Interventional

Study design

Multi-site randomised single-blind controlled trial

Study type(s)

Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Attainment at GCSE and self-efficacy

Interventions

Current interventions as of 30/06/2016:

All Year 10 and Year 11 pupils in the participating schools will be individually randomised to either treatment or control condition, stratifying by year group, class and FSM status.

This is a multi-site single blind controlled trial.

The intervention is a writing activity where the treatment group writes about values that are important to them while the control pupils are given an alternative writing exercise, which could be about values that are not important to them but may be important to others. The writing activity will be delivered by English language teachers during their regular English lessons just before the GCSE exams. Pupils will be given approximately 15 minutes to complete the writing exercise.

Previous interventions:

All Year 10 and Year 11 pupils in the participating schools will be individually randomised to either treatment or control condition, stratifying by year group, class and FSM status.

This is a double-blind experiment where both pupils and teachers will not be told what the intervention involves.

The intervention is a writing activity where the treatment group writes about values that are important to them while the control pupils are given an alternative writing exercise, which could be about values that are not important to them but may be important to others. The writing activity will be delivered by English language teachers during their regular English lessons just before the GCSE exams. Pupils will be given approximately 15 minutes to complete the writing exercise.

Intervention Type

Other

Primary outcome(s)

1. Attainment 8 at GCSE for EverFSM pupils after 1 year of treatment
2. Attainment 8 at GCSE for EverFSM pupils 1 year after end of intervention

Key secondary outcome(s)

Current secondary outcome measures as of 30/06/2016:

1. Attainment 8 at GCSE for all pupils after 1 year of treatment
2. Attainment 8 at GCSE for all pupils 1 year after end of intervention
3. Self-efficacy: The self-efficacy survey will be first measured in September 2016, then again in June/July 2017 (Y10 only). It will be assessed via a paper and pencil survey distributed within tutor or form time within schools by form tutors.

Previous secondary outcome measures:

1. Attainment 8 at GCSE for all pupils after 1 year of treatment
2. Attainment 8 at GCSE for all pupils 1 year after end of intervention
3. One non-attainment outcome measure one year after end of intervention to be confirmed and protocol updated by August 2016

Completion date

01/12/2019

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

All Year 10 and Year 11 pupils from 25 secondary schools in the South-East of England with above average EverFSM eligible pupils

Participant type(s)

Other

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Child

Sex

All

Key exclusion criteria

1. Primary schools
2. Secondary schools outside the South-East of England
3. Secondary schools with fewer than 10% of EverFSM-eligible pupils

Date of first enrolment

23/11/2015

Date of final enrolment

30/06/2016

Locations

Countries of recruitment

United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre

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Study participating centre

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Sponsor information

Organisation

Education Endowment Foundation (UK)

ROR

<https://ror.org/03bhd6288>

Funder(s)

Funder type

Charity

Funder Name

Education Endowment Foundation (UK)

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

Not provided at time of registration

IPD sharing plan summary

Stored in repository

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Funder report results	addendum to results (not peer-reviewed)		03/09/2020	No	No
Funder report results	results (not peer-reviewed)		03/09/2020	No	No
Protocol file		01/08/2016	09/08/2022	No	No
Statistical Analysis Plan		06/11/2017	09/08/2022	No	No