

Home and away: building cultural capital to encourage progression to higher education

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Introduction

This chapter discusses a programme delivered by the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Collaborative Outreach Programme (DANCOP), which is part of the Uni Connect Programme (formerly the National Collaborative Outreach Programme) funded by the Office for Students (OfS). The programme has the over-arching aim of increasing progression to higher education in specific target wards where progression to higher education is low given GSCE attainment in those areas. There are 29 partnerships operating across England that offer impartial information on progression to higher education. Locally, DANCOP is a partnership comprised of universities and colleges across the two counties led by the University of Derby. The targeted outreach programme began in January 2017 with a current planned end date of July 2021. Within the scope of this initiative, each partnership has been able to design and deliver outreach programmes to suit local need.

As part of our programme of activities, DANCOP procured the services of World Challenge, a not-for-profit provider of organised overseas trips, to deliver three separate ten-day trips to Morocco in April 2019, for 43 year ten learners from areas of low progression across Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.¹ The trips, part of a longer and fuller programme of activity, incorporated trekking in the Atlas Mountains, involvement in a community project in rural Morocco, and becoming immersed into a different culture in Marrakech. The trips were designed to improve the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) of learners in response to schools' requests for experiences that offer cultural enrichment – opportunities that they typically struggle to offer. The policy context surrounding the

cultural capital discourse provided a valid rationale for decision makers within DANCOP to decide to pilot a project of this kind.

Learners were identified by schools as those who are neither the best nor the worst in terms of attainment and classroom behaviour but who often lack motivation, are ‘coasting’ and/or are reluctant to join in classroom activities. These learners were deemed to have the potential to respond well to a re-motivating, extraordinary experience, as part of a longer-term programme of intervention. The aim of the trips was to have a positive impact on learners’ views of progression to higher education and attitudes towards self.

This chapter explores whether the programme has had a positive impact on learners’ views of progression to higher education and their attitudes towards self. It also considers the challenges such a programme can present.

Policy context

Half of all local authority areas in the East Midlands are social mobility coldspots (Social Mobility Commission, 2017), meaning these are places where people are not likely to climb up the economic or social ladder of life (Major and Machin, 2018). DANCOP has had an opportunity to provide an experience for learners that they may not otherwise be able to engage with, such as experiencing a different culture. Across Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire 30% of working-age people earn less than the national living wage, and a concern is locally recognised that there are not enough higher paid roles across the area (D2N2, 2019).

Ranked 303 out of 324 districts across England on the social mobility index (Social Mobility Commission, 2017), Derby was awarded Opportunity Area funding in 2017 by the Department for Education. One key strategic aim of the Opportunity Area project for Derby is ‘to ensure all our children benefit from a broad range of experiences throughout their school lives’ (Department for Education, 2017: 26). This Opportunity Area’s plan explores the link between poor social and cultural capital

and disengagement in school, low confidence and increased chances of unemployment.

The prominence of the discussion around cultural capital has been most recently heightened by learners' knowledge of the importance of cultural capital being included as a metric in the new Ofsted education inspection framework (Ofsted, 2019). This has sparked interest and debate, with some criticism being levelled that the terminology is poorly understood by those expected to develop this kind of capital in young people (Guardian, 2019). The issue of cultural capital is potentially an area for projects such as DANCOP to explore how it might contribute to CPD in this area.

There is currently much discourse in education around the term cultural capital, which is derived from the work of sociologist Bourdieu in the 1970s, who defines cultural capital as the accumulation of knowledge, behaviours and skills that demonstrate cultural competence and social status (Bourdieu, 1977). This concept underpins initiatives across the student lifecycle and has since developed through research into students' experiences of travelling abroad to improve learning. Much of the research carried out has investigated students' development through study abroad trips. Studies such as Laubscher (1994) and Lamet and Lamet (1982) show links between out-of-the-classroom experiences and improved outcomes in education. Laubscher's (1994) study into the experiences of study abroad students found that travel experience improved the students' learning during the trip. The experience of travelling benefited the students' personal development, by fostering greater independence and increasing their self-confidence. This is also affirmed by Lamet and Lamet (1982) where research found that the majority of respondents (62%) found the out-of-class experiences to be the most impactful in terms of their development.

UniversitiesUK International, with funding from the European Union's Erasmus+ Programme, has invested heavily in providing undergraduate learners with opportunities to travel as part of their higher level studies, with the aim of improving their cultural capital and providing outward mobility, that in turn should enhance their employability. Reporting on the 2015-16 graduating cohort, UniversitiesUK found that disadvantaged

learners and learners from low-participation neighbourhoods were less likely to be outwardly mobile during their degree studies but benefitted more from those experiences than their peers. This report showed that among graduates from low-participation neighbourhoods, of those that had opportunities for outward mobility, 72.4% were in graduate-level roles six months after graduating, compared to 66.9% of their non-mobile peers. The study found that this also meant that mobile learners were more likely to be earning more money after graduation (UniversitiesUK, 2018). Against this backdrop, it could be inferred that similar outcomes could be achieved by increasing the mobility of school-age learners.

Such opportunities are not as readily available for school-level learners; we know from the consultation with school staff that many across our region have never even visited a local city such as Derby, Nottingham or Sheffield. These trips to Morocco, embedded into a longer-term programme of activity, have been provided to help address some of the challenges.

The programme

At the time of writing, the evaluation of the first phase of NCOP/ The Uni Connect Programme has just been published by the OfS. This externally commissioned piece of work highlights the importance of learners engaging in multiple interventions in order to have a positive impact on their knowledge of, and attitudes towards, higher education (Bowes et al., 2019). This was the approach DANCOP took in the design of the programme, with learners interacting with DANCOP a number of times in advance of the trip itself. The programme has not yet concluded, with activities planned in order to draw on and continue to sustain the momentum created with the participants and their families. These activities will extend into the current planned end of the Uni Connect programme.

Initially, we aimed to engage 60 learners in the programme, with the view that on each of the three trips to Morocco, 20 learners would attend. DANCOP's delivery hubs approached schools they had positive working relationships with, in order to best apply the criteria for selecting learners and to ensure engagement. Schools recommended learners to apply and those individuals wrote applications for the programme that were endorsed

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by school staff. Working with schools in this way enabled project officers to ensure that the learners selected were not only from one of DANCOP's 63 target wards but were also appropriate in terms of their personality and abilities: mid-attainers with fair behaviour who lacked motivation/aspiration and tended to be 'coasting' in school. The 43 learners engaged on the programme had home addresses in 15 out of 63 target wards across Derbyshire and Nottingham, which serves as the key targeting metric for the OfS. These 15 wards are located in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, and learners on each trip came from a range of schools and wards.

The learners were split fairly evenly in terms of gender, with 23 female learners and 20 males in total. They were split across three trips, each led by one of DANCOP's delivery hubs, as demonstrated in Figure 1.

To support engagement with the programme, DANCOP covered most of the costs for learners, although learners were asked to fundraise a minimum of £200 in order for them to explore the value of money and develop their enterprise skills.

Figure 1: Learners per trip by gender

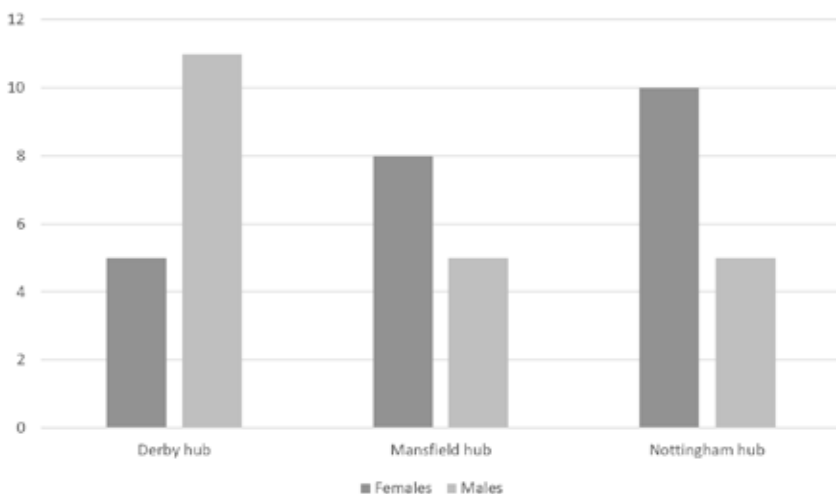


Table 1: Engagements with all learners before the trips

September - October 2018	Project Officers attended target schools to talk to staff and learners about the trips
October 2018	Launch Events: parents/carers, learners and teachers attended launch events at one of our partner HE providers to learn more about the specifics of the trips.
November 2018	Camping training weekend: selected learners attended a two-day camping/walking weekend in Buckinghamshire to meet the leaders and develop key skills such as team building.
February 2019	All learners attended a University Experience day, which included a campus tour and information about applying to, and studying at, university. They also learnt more about the trip, prepared kit, and worked on fundraising plans.
April 2019	Trips to Morocco took place, beginning with a pre-departure planning day at either University of Derby or University of Nottingham.
May 2019	Celebration evening to take place at University of Nottingham.

On the training camping weekend that took place five months before departure to Morocco, 43 learners attended. All 43 learners then departed for Morocco despite the amount of time that had passed since the camping weekend, an additional positive result of creating a sustained multi-intervention programme which retained learners' engagement.

Table 1 shows the engagements with all learners before the trips.

Alongside the set programme, learners and parents interacted with the DANCOP team a number of times on a more tailored and structured basis than is usual, with the team supporting fundraising sessions and discussing preparation for the trips. Research completed on behalf of the Office for Students by ICM Unlimited (2019) stated that parents and carers are key

influencers in shaping young people's decisions around higher education pathways. This has underpinned our priority to engage parents and carers through the process of the World Challenge project. It has also increased teachers' understanding of the influence and impact that family can have on young people's attitudes towards higher education, reaffirming the importance of engaging parents in the conversation around students' progression to higher education. A study by O' Sullivan et al (2019) shows that there is a strong influence on students' decisions by particular groups of individuals within their social network, with one in particular being family. A student who sees someone close to them attend university will be more inclined to progress on to higher education, as they feel their own goals and dreams can become a reality. This is borne out in the work of Bourdieu (1990, cited in Reay, 1998), where students often benchmark themselves against their family members. If they see and experience their family going to university, they will too as an unspoken assumption is made that they can also access higher education. Bourdieu (1990 cited in Reay, 1998: 526) states this as what is 'reasonable' to the students from what they experience in their familial habitus. By maintaining frequent and consistent contact with learners' parents and carers, we were trying to effectively engage one of the biggest influencers in the learners' decision-making process by keeping parents and carers informed throughout the programme. In turn this will hopefully increase the parents and carers' understanding of higher education and ultimately influence the learners' understanding too.

The learners are now in year eleven, which presents some challenges for engagement as they are focusing on their exams and the schools' focus is on their attainment and progression at post-16.² To address these challenges we are planning to support the learners with a study skills session in February 2020, and will be offering one-to-one mentoring when they reach year twelve, or enter further education in the academic year 2020/21.

Evaluation and impact

EMWPREP (the East Midlands Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Partnership) supported DANCOP by collating evaluation data and providing analysis from an impartial, external perspective.

The evaluation feedback we have collected so far was through pre- and post-project evaluation forms for learners, post-project evaluation for parents and carers, and a parental focus group that took place during the celebration event and was extremely well attended.

The pre- and post- evaluation measured changes in attitudes, capturing the ‘distance travelled’ on a number of topics related to higher education, as well as looking at learners’ views on confidence and their own ability to do well. Use of a Likert scale was intended to allow the opportunity to review the statistical significance of the responses. An example of a question used is in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Aspirations for the future

How much do you agree with the following statements about your aspirations for the future?

Aspirations	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
I am motivated to do well in my studies						
I could get the grades I need for further study						
I could gain a place on a good course if I wanted to						

Table 2: Biggest shifts in positive responses

Statement	Increase in positive response after trip
My family would like me to go to university	25.6%
I know the options in terms of where to live whilst studying	25.6%
I know what UCAS is	21.3%
I agree I am able to do things as well as most people	18.4%
I know the financial support available for higher level study	17.9%
I know the costs of study	15.4%
I know the qualifications and grades needed to get onto the course I want	15.4%
I feel I have enough information to decide which higher education option would suit me best	15.4%

It is not possible, in the remit of this paper, to discuss the results of every question as there were 44 questions posed. However, in general, attitudes towards higher education, progression, and learners' own views about confidence and their ability to succeed all showed an increase in positive responses. The biggest positive shifts **are shown in Table 2.**

Overall, this set of results showed that learners had a much greater understanding of higher education after the programme. DANCOP's programme-wide baseline survey for the academic year 2019/20 indicates that with year nine and ten learners, knowledge about UCAS and specifics about higher education study is specifically lacking and so it is positive that has been addressed through this programme.³

It is also encouraging to see that they felt, after the trip, that their families were so much more positive about them going on to university. At the celebration event held at the University of Nottingham, 39 of the learners

attended with their families, evidencing the impact the trip and project has had on engaging with key family members and influencers.

There were, however, some decreases in positive responses for eight of the statements posed, as shown in Table 3.

These present interesting discussion points. The three trips to Morocco that took place were very much three different trips in terms of the types of learners that went on each trip and the dynamics and challenges they presented. On one trip, the DANCOP staff found they were managing significant behaviour challenges with some of the learners, which resulted in follow-up conversations with parents and school staff on arrival back in the UK. In the follow-up questionnaires learners had had opportunity to reflect on their behaviour and the impact of their actions, which could have impacted how they felt about themselves and their own qualities.

Also, a number of staff members who attended the trips felt that learners' exposure to some of the situations and communities in Morocco may well have affected some of these results. Learners were engaged in community projects where facilities were much more basic than those they were

Table 3: Decreases in positive responses

Statement	Decrease in positive response after trip
I feel I have a number of good qualities	-7.2%
Some universities are better than others	-5.1%
I am responsible for what happens to me	-4.9%
I am a hard worker	-4.8%
I finish whatever I begin	-4.3%
How likely are you to apply to do a HE qualification in the future	-3.3%
I could get the grades I need for further study	-2.6%
My family values some universities more than others	-2.6%

typically exposed to in the UK, and they saw Moroccan teenagers and children working hard on improving their own buildings and communities and striving for a better way of life. As all learners were asked to complete a reflective journal and to look back on their time in Morocco at the celebration event, it stands to reason that they may have, for example, perceived themselves as hard working before the trip, but not after they had exposure to these kinds of communities. This reflective approach and re-evaluation of self is not necessarily a negative.

A significant challenge within our work, more generally, has been successful parental engagement. This, paired with the evidence, shows that family influence is key in supporting learners' decisions around higher education (Tazzyman et al, 2018). Therefore, it was vital we included a post-project parent/carer focus group so we were able to review evidence of engagement of this kind. Qualitative methods were used to collect the responses of parents/carers from a range of questions.

As mentioned, we are pleased to report that a key success with this particular programme was, in fact, the way in which we were able to engage with parents, carers and families. All but four families attended the celebration event that took place in one of the most prestigious buildings on University of Nottingham's main campus, and most also attended information sessions within higher education establishments. The results show that some learners believe their parents are now more engaged with university as an option. This represents a really positive development in terms of breaking down a barrier. To ensure full engagement during the trip and to reduce the risk of loss or theft of possessions learners were not permitted to take a mobile phone. Parents, however, could still use Twitter for non-urgent communication. This meant we had direct access to parents' thoughts and responses to videos and photos that the teams were posting, as they had no other method of receiving general updates. An example of some of the comments are as follows:

xxx has had an amazing experience with memories and achievements that she'll keep forever. Thank you so much for giving her the chance and guiding her along the journey. Emma, Paige and Kabir and all who worked to set this up, we'll be eternally grateful.

Thank you so much for all your hard work and dedication to making this experience so memorable for xxx. He's gained some invaluable life lessons on this trip and we can already see a change in him!

And a huge thank you to Emma, Paige and Kabir for making the trip amazing for xxx has had the best time of his life and will remember his time in Morocco forever.

The effort that parents invested in travelling to the celebration event, which for some was a 25 mile journey, indicates that we created a real 'hook' for parents. Many of the parents who attended commented that they had never been to a university before this programme, and we were able to show that university is a real possibility for their child.

Challenges and limitations

It would not be prudent if DANCOP did not take the time to reflect on the programme as there was significant investment into this programme, both in terms of cash and time. Timeframes and workload were two of the biggest challenges for delivering the programme. World Challenge usually run the project over a two-year period, including pre-trip information evenings, and put aside time to fundraise for the total cost of the trip. DANCOP's programme from start to departure, however, ran over 9 months, the reduced timeframe being a consequence of working on a programme that is short-term in its entirety, with extensions of funding only confirmed in short bursts. With such limited time, DANCOP project officers had to build trust and rapport with schools quickly to advertise, recruit and complete the application process. This required a prompt response from the DANCOP hub teams, the schools and learners. As well as maintaining strong relationships with schools, learners and their families, communication had to be a focal point of planning for the teams. There was a fine balance between frequent and detailed communication without overloading learners. Information for the programme had to be clear and concise to ensure all the relevant detail was provided, as well as maintaining stakeholder engagement and ensuring that everyone felt prepared.

The impacts and benefits of employing a progressive and sustained approach to outreach programmes for universities: a case study – the Progress to Success framework

The tighter time frame also meant that learners had less time to fundraise to support their trip. DANCOP covered more of the costs than would be usual in a trip of this kind, and dedicated time to supporting learners in making plans to carry out fundraising activity. The impact of this could be that learners did not take as much ownership for their trips as we would have liked, but we had to consider that these particular learners had much less access to networks with funds than other learners may have.

Throughout the trip, the safeguarding and wellbeing of the learners and staff remained the highest priority for DANCOP and World Challenge. There was an added layer of challenge and workload for the teams, with the trip having elements of high emotional and physical intensity, and with factors such as behaviour, illness and repatriation all being issues. Some learners, as you would expect given the nature of who we were targeting, struggled with aspects of the trip and there was a need for a constant dialogue between the in-country team, the DANCOP central team, and the World Challenge team, not to mention parents and schools. The team members out on the trips with learners relied heavily on the support and communication of the DANCOP central team, as well as the support from World Challenge. As a result, the whole of the DANCOP team's workload was affected. The trips ran for overlapping periods during the Easter holidays and this meant that at one point, six team members were in Morocco at the same time. After the trip, the impact was still significant due to the need for staff rest and time accrued in lieu, as well as logistical tasks for post trip activity and evaluation.

DANCOP has worked hard to build trust with schools and parents in order to make this programme a success. However, due to the challenges with schools' understanding of GDPR and the sense of fear that is still embedded within schools about the sharing of data, there have been a number of complications along the way that have also added to a complex time frame.

In terms of evaluating and measuring impact, it was the case with many of the questions that results were not statistically significant, therefore strong impact assertions cannot be made. It is recognised that the findings could have been strengthened through the use of control and comparison

groups of learners, however the decision was made not to pursue this due to a number of concerns. A control group would involve engaging additional eligible learners in the wrap-around activities but withholding certain aspects of the programme, such as the trip to Morocco. DANCOP management and Steering Group felt this to be ethically questionable given the nature of the cohort and the potentially life-changing outcomes of the trip. Consequently, as is common for many outreach activities, establishing concrete causal links is extremely challenging.

Conclusions

In terms of the logistics and organisation of the programme, the DANCOP team have a significant list of 'lessons learnt' with the major recommendation being to ensure there is more time for planning prior to the trip abroad taking place, particularly as the administrative tasks were a considerable undertaking. Similarly, more time was required for the fundraising aspect to further embed the value of enterprise and budget management. In future, the team would include even more interventions before the trip to build a stronger rapport and trust with the learners and mitigate behavioural challenges. That said, what was achieved in a short time is significant, and the short time frame is symptomatic of the Uni Connect Programme itself being short-term and typically with funding confirmed in short bursts and with limited notice.

Due to the tight timeframe and the fact that relationships with some schools were still being built at this stage in the programme we elected to approach only schools with which we had a sound and consistent rapport. If we were to repeat the programme, we would have the opportunity to approach more, if not all, of our target schools and colleges (80). For some activities that we run where there is high demand, we now randomly select participants; the message being that we are now typically over-subscribed for activities and could afford to trial new approaches or consider engaging schools we do not intensively work with.

On the advice of EMWPREP in their external evaluation, DANCOP is strengthening its planned efforts to re-engage with students and parents/carers in the future via a series of follow-up survey activities to discover

whether the changes exhibited by learners have remained and thus represent longer-term outcomes of the event. It might also be interesting to gather follow-up data once they have completed their GCSEs and chosen their level three (A-Level or equivalent) options, to establish what this early progression on the road to higher education looks like. Tracking these learners to see if they progress onto higher education will be valuable but unfortunately this would not be realised until a time beyond the current planned life of DANCOP. In terms of what the results do show, and what the reflective journals convey, we do feel we have made significant grounds in enhancing understanding of higher education and in improving cultural capital.

There was some anecdotal commentary reported by DANCOP staff who travelled to Morocco with the learners that suggests that learners engaged in the programme had perceptions as to why they had been targeted to apply for the programme, with some citing they had been picked because they ‘never get picked for anything’ and others stating they knew they’d been picked because of their behaviour or something negative they’d done in school. Whether their perceptions were accurate or not, there is a suggested undercurrent of learners being aware of a ‘label’ that was applied to them. Similar comments were made on a DANCOP-funded summer school where learners told student ambassadors they were there because of ‘where they live’. DANCOP cannot control what schools or parents communicate about why certain learners are engaged in projects and programmes, but consideration needs to be given to how labelling influences learners’ self-perception and how they feel about their own place in society. Reay (2010) in her studies around social class in English schools found that this is a significant problem in schools and entrenched in whole communities. Major and Machin (2018) discuss the role that genetics plays in social mobility and ‘breaking the cycle’, but conclude that there are a number of factors at play and to challenge any of this we need sustained, intensive work that challenges beliefs and cultures of whole communities and across generations.

It is this kind of commentary that emphasises the importance of parental and family engagement, and this is a particular area where the programme has had some successes. Affecting a cultural change around perceptions to

higher education is extremely important. Hoare and Mann's (2012) impact evaluation of Sutton Trust's summer schools programme found that summer schools make the biggest difference to those who are from low participation neighbourhoods and have non-graduate parents. Gale et al (2010), in a study of outreach interventions in various countries including the UK, found that ultimately the best way to encourage engagement with higher education was to involve families and communities, and to foster learner engagement in aspiration-raising activity from primary age - an age when parents are, at least at some level, required to engage with schools. Their findings point to creating 'cultures of possibility' where parents and families have the opportunity to look outside of their locality; in the trips to Morocco we created a 'hook' by which we were able to draw parents out to explore what really is feasible.

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Endnotes

1. Year ten learners are 14-15 years old
2. Year eleven learners are 15 and 16 years old and in their GCSE year of study.
3. 13-15 year olds

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