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Project success - an inner-city partnership pilot programme

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PROJECT SUCCESS - AN INNER-CITY PARTNERSHIP PILOT PROGRAMME

Flinn E A

University of Salford

Introduction

The project aims at a re-orientation of attitudes among inner-city schoolchildren, improving their self-image and their attitudes towards post-school education and employment. These children lead almost unbelievably circumscribed lives. They see no place for themselves, or at best only a menial role, in the world of employment, and regard education beyond the minimum legal requirement as something quite without relevance to their lives. Even at the pre-16 level education is perceived as having little value, and truancy rates in inner-city schools are often well over 50%. The vehicle for the re-orientation process is a partnership between local education authorities, industry and commerce, and higher education. The University of Salford is a partner in the Salford Compact, and Project SUCCESS may be regarded as a wider extension of the compact principle.

The Programme

Project SUCCESS involves a range of activities which integrate the University of Salford into the support of schools education across the curriculum. Although the University of Salford is relatively small, individual departments are in many cases among the largest in the country. This is particularly true in technology and modern languages - two areas in which additional support for schools education is most needed.

The University, with its widespread links with industry and commerce, aims to support schools education through Project SUCCESS in a number of ways.

1 Possibly the most important activity is the use of student tutors to support and assist teachers in local schools and colleges. The basic principle is not new, but such student tutorship schemes in the past have always involved essentially spare-time activity on the part of the students concerned. In Project SUCCESS, students' activities constitute a formal, though optional, part of their undergraduate studies. Their activities are formally assessed, and the results rank alongside their other examination marks as a measure of their educational progress. In 1989/90, 42 second-year Physics and Electrical Engineering students have taken part in the project; each week they spent one afternoon in schools throughout the Greater Manchester region.

The presence of such student tutors in the classroom gives to school students role-models of recognisably human young people who have chosen to carry on to higher education, and will both encourage them to consider more seriously the possibility of undertaking further or higher education, and help decide their choice of subject within such post-school education. The scheme also allows University students to see at first hand life in the classroom, and may persuade some to take up teaching as a career. This is particularly important in view of the shortage of teachers in precisely those subjects in which the University of Salford is strongest.

A comparison of those students joining the Student Tutor scheme with those opting for the alternative Business Studies option throws up some interesting results. The student tutors came overwhelmingly from among the more able students, as determined by their examination results at the end of the first year. Over 90% are in the upper half of the class, while 50% are in the upper quartile. Psychometric and other tests on both student tutors and school pupils were carried out at the beginning and end of the programme, and are currently in the process of evaluation.

A list of school activities undertaken by tutors is appended, and it is interesting to note the preponderance of technology and related classes. It is clear that this is an area in which schools see a valuable role for student tutors. Among other activities, courses based on MFA and Control Pathways

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proved extremely popular and successful. Two students produced a short video describing the project and illustrating a few of the activities.

2 In the same way, the University's widespread industrial and commercial contacts are being used to get industrialists and businessmen involved with schools education in a more direct and personal way than in most industry/education links, alongside students and staff of the University. In this way school pupils can see that people from the worlds of business and industry too are recognisably real human beings, and come to realise that these activities can offer them genuine opportunities. At present, inner-city children feel that they are unwanted, and quite inadequate to aspire to such jobs, which they regard quite literally as the private preserve of the middle classes. To achieve such a change of attitude, it is vital that these tutors from the world of commerce be involved with pupils on a reasonably continuing basis, as in the case of the university students above. The involvement need not be excessively demanding - even one hour a week for a term can be invaluable. Typical activities can include business or technology projects, or, with sixth-form students, personal skills training of the kind often given to new management recruits.

3 School students can use the University's facilities - technology and science laboratories, language laboratories etc - to extend and enhance their studies. Members of University staff work with teachers and industrialists, both in the University laboratory and in the classroom, in these and other activities. The Salford Engineering Club, which encourages school pupils to undertake projects in design and technology, is one facet of this activity.

Target Group

If children's attitudes to education beyond the compulsory minimum are to be fundamentally altered, they must be reached and influenced before the age at which irrevocable educational decisions are made. The main target group is the 14-18 age group, and in particular the 14-16 group. It will be increasingly important to influence these pupils in the future, since all the evidence indicates that, because of the demographic decline, many employers who now recruit at 18 will change their policy to one of recruitment at 16+, so that these children will lose the option of going on to higher education.

Industrial and commercial involvement may be with either group; a sixth-form college vice-principal has been seconded to this activity, and is currently helping deliver a personal development programme for school students, in collaboration with a major information technology firm.

Industrial and Other Support

The launch of a major initiative such as Project SUCCESS demands support from both the public and the private sector. So far, the search for support from the private sector has been largely restricted to a relatively small number of firms; even so, significant industrial support has already been received. A large multi-national computer firm has offered the services of staff members on a part-time basis, to help in the development and delivery of packages involving the staff and students of the University, school staff, and industrial and business personnel. A major oil company has given financial support, and other firms both large and small have given support in kind.

The University and the City of Salford are naturally giving support in kind, in staff time, accommodation and expertise. E.C. funding was awarded under the PETRA programme, to try to identify a European partner city or cities with similar problems, and funding has been given by public bodies such as DTI and the Training Agency.

Technology

Since the undergraduates involved have been engineering and science students, it is not surprising that a major part of their activity has been in the area of Design Technology - indeed this was one of the undeclared aims of the project.

Design technology activities included tuition in MFA and Control Pathways, and the development of coursework material for the latter which will be used in future by teachers as a normal part of the

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school's activities. At one school the students organised a Technology afternoon. This began with talks by the students on engineering as a career, followed by discussion with pupils and then a structures competition, using glue and paper. (In fact, the supply of weights available proved insufficient to test the winning design to destruction - it triumphantly withstood all the available load, plus all the bars of chocolate which constituted the prizes.) At another school, students organised a competition for the best self-powered car, with a small trophy for the winner. In yet another, students offered, as part of the normal Design Technology programme, a short project on simple two-dimensional structures, based essentially on the design of roof trusses; again this finished with a test to destruction of the various models constructed. In yet another school, students designed and delivered a short introductory course on simple radio construction, and in the same school the helped install a school broadcasting system.

Even in such areas as music, the students often introduced pupils to electronic instruments; groups of pupils at two schools composed and recorded their own electronic music.

Overall, it seems safe to conclude that, apart from specifically technological classroom activities, close and continuing contact between pupils and young people who have chosen to pursue technology as a career cannot fail to stimulate their interest in Design Technology as a curriculum subject.

Evaluation

Extensive tests were carried out in an attempt to evaluate the project. Some of the results are still in the process of analysis, but some specific conclusions can be drawn, as seen from the enclosed histograms. On these diagrams, a value of 1 indicates no effect, and a value of 5 a very strong effect.

1 It is clear that the activity, as perceived by the teachers involved, has had a significant effect on the attitudes of the pupils involved, making them look more favourably on the prospect of continuing their education beyond the compulsory age (Figure 1). Their attitude towards students in general has also become much more positive - a major benefit, in view of the friction, often leading to violence, between students and local teenagers in the inner-city. In spite of the extra work involved, the teachers concerned were overwhelmingly in favour of the project's continuation (Figure 2).

2 The students involved perceive it as a valuable exercise in self-development, as well as an opportunity to help others perhaps less fortunately-placed than themselves. They feel that it has helped them improve over a wide range of personal skills (Figure 3); their skills in group working, communication and problem solving in particular are felt to have been strongly enhanced (Figure 4). Overwhelmingly too, they feel that the exercise has increased their maturity and self-confidence (Figure 5).

Conclusion

Overall, the results of the pilot programme are most encouraging, especially in view of the difficulties of organising such a complex activity, and the very short run-up time which was available. Its success must in large part be ascribed to the teachers involved, and in particular to the link teachers at each school.

We shall continue and expand the project in 1990-91. As well as science and engineering undergraduates, students from the University's IT Institute should be joining the scheme for its second year, so that a wider range of skills and activities can be offered to our local schools. The emphasis will again be on technology and IT, and we are confident that as a result the status of these subjects will be enhanced in the eyes of school pupils.

Our hope is that when we have conclusively demonstrated the practicality and value of the scheme, the same theme will be taken up by other institutions in other areas, to the benefit of all.

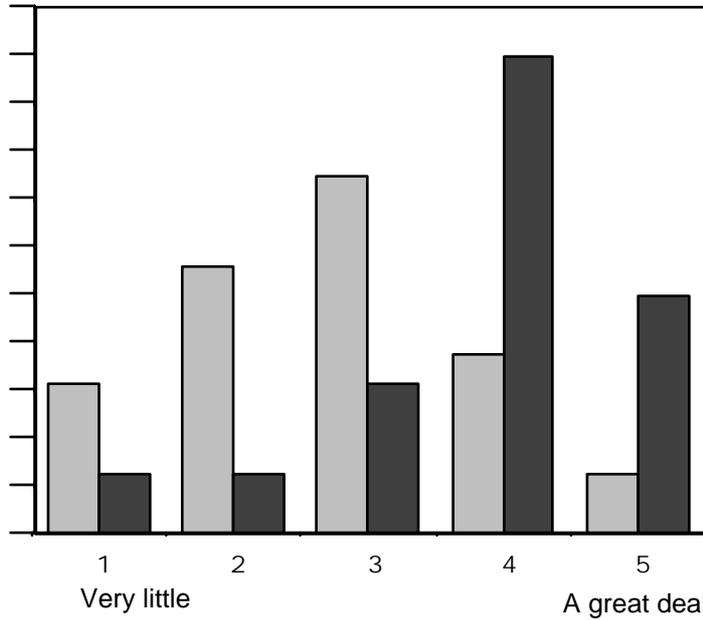
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SCHOOL SUBJECT AREAS IN WHICH STUDENT TUTORS ARE WORKING

Mathematics
Business Studies, Word Processing, Typing
Information Technology
Music
General Science
Technology
Control Technology
Physics
Personal and Social Education, Careers
PE, Games
Geography
Poetry Appreciation
Enterprise
French
Art
German
Performing Arts
Design Technology
Healthy Living / Fitness Testing

Teachers' Responses 1990

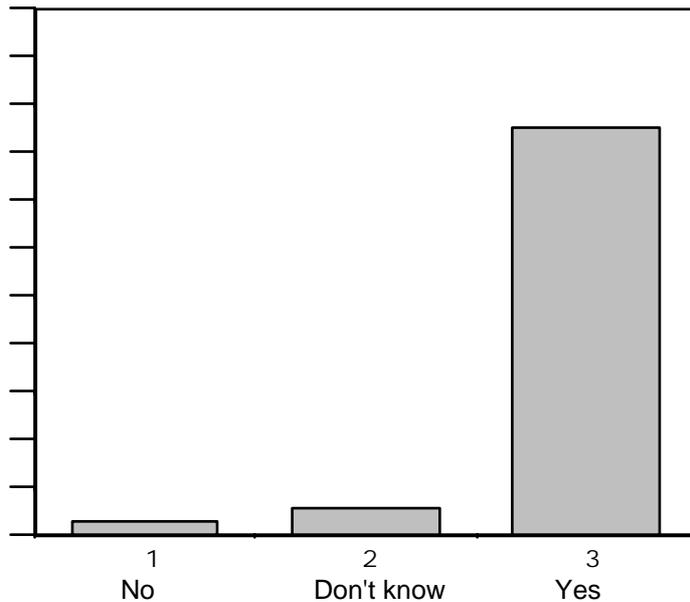
Figure 1



- To what extent do you consider the project has caused the school students involved in the project to consider more favourably the possibility of going on the higher, further or continuing education ?

- To what extent do you consider the project has caused school students involved in the project to feel more favourably disposed towards university students ?

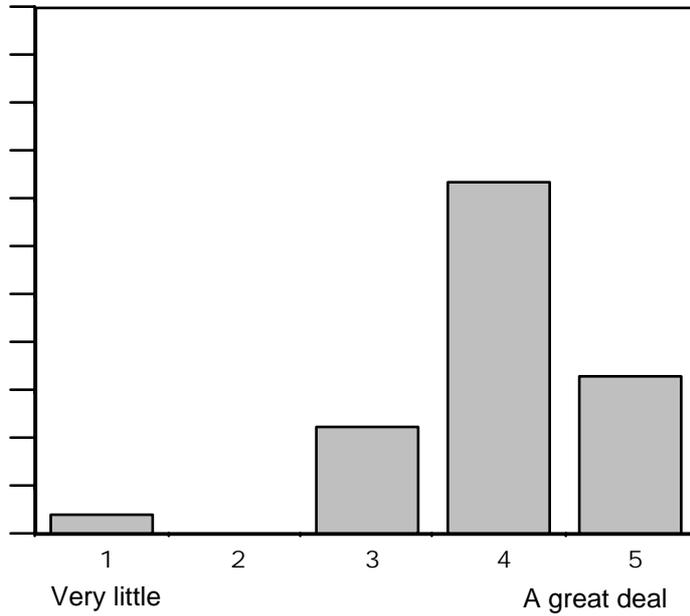
Figure 2



Do you favour the continuation of the project in future years in your school ?

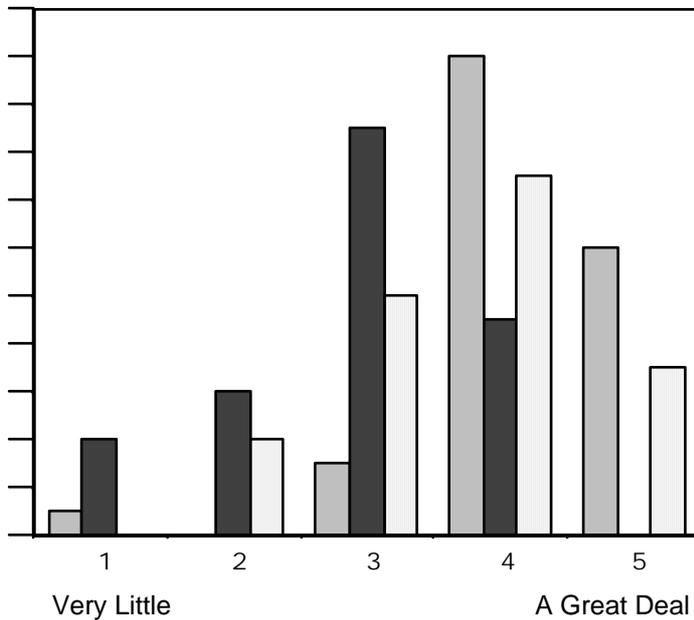
Students' Responses 1990

Figure 3



The extent to which this project helped me to improve my personal skills

Figure 4



The extent to which this project helped me to:

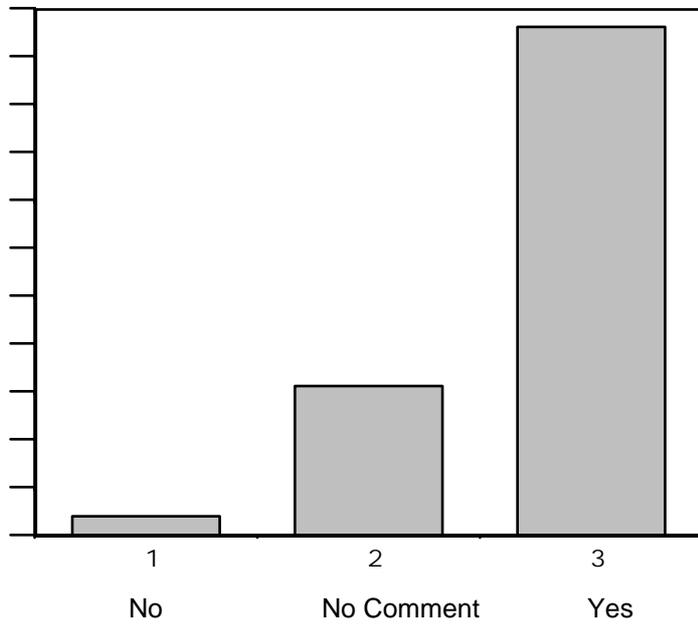
 develop my communication skills

 improve problem solving skills

 improve group working skills

Students' Responses 1990

Figure 5



Do you feel that this project has helped develop your maturity and self confidence ?