An Empirical Study to Determine How Educators can Help all Young People Flourish

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Abstract

This piece of work has been undertaken to help identify ways in which we can help young people notice and develop their natural skills and talents. I was concerned that some students felt like their skills and abilities were not valued and therefore not valuable.

I spent time collecting research from a variety of people from different backgrounds and with different skills and talents. I gathered data from some small discussion groups, a number of one-to-one interviews and an online questionnaire.

From the research I was able to ascertain that my hypothesis could be endorsed. It was noticeable that some skills are promoted higher than other skills which can impact self-esteem and deprive people from flourishing. I found that skills are valued differently in varying contexts but some skills appear undervalued across multiple contexts. Helping young people feel valued can help them succeed.

I was able to identify a number of ways that help young people reach their potential and flourish. This included encouragement, providing new opportunities and helping young people excel in skills they are passionate about and enjoy.

Young people helped me to identify ways in which they work best and the environments in which they are productive.

I believe that young people should be valued equally. That all people are intelligent and that we all can and should contribute to society. For this to happen I perceive that the alleviation of the skills hierarchy is necessary and we should be seeking to help individuals find what they are passionate about, enjoy and naturally succeed in and use those tools to help them thrive and develop holistically.

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<u>Introduction</u>

As a Schools and Youth Worker I am in regular contact with a number of young people facing multiple challenges, changes and complications. There are young people that appear to thrive but underneath harbour personal problems or passions. There are young people that outwardly display signs of struggle. Other young people have low self-esteem or feel like they have little or nothing to add to society. Many young people have anxieties about the future, unsure of where they will be in ten years which can leave them feeling demotivated or despondent. The purpose of this research is to help all young people embrace their brilliance and help them thrive.

One of the best known theories surrounding human flourishing is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Pichère (2015, p. 5) describes these as physiological, security, recognition, esteem and accomplishment needs. All of these needs contribute to human flourishing and it is the purpose of this study to find ways to help young people meet those needs and reach their full potential.

My passion is to help young people from all backgrounds to flourish and to be both recognised and valued as intelligent people who have much to contribute to the world. I believe young people should never feel they are unintelligent or unimportant or to be labelled as non-academic or any other negative label that can be given. All young people matter, in my opinion, this indeed was the premise of the policy entitled 'Every Child Matters' which was introduced in 2003 under the Labour government before it was replaced with the change of government, "the change of government brought changes in focus and with it, changes in terminology; 'Every Child Matters' was replaced by 'Help children achieve more'" (Ross, et al., 2015, p. 215). To me the transformed slogan represents a criterion that is placed upon human flourishing. Flourishing according to this definition has become interchangeable with achievement. I can conceive that this can also be described as achieving more academically. This specification draws us away from a holistic view of human flourishing and is my concern in this dissertation.

As a Schools and Youth Worker, I am acutely aware that some young students might be fascinated with ethical debates surrounding global warming, some might listen to intricate poetry through the medium of grime music for three hours per day and regularly fill scrapbooks with creative entries, others might diplomatically motivate a group towards achieving wonderful results in a group work activity. This is the purpose of my dissertation, to find effective ways to help all young people to thrive including some who may feel unable to succeed because their skills are under-valued, left un-nurtured, or missed.

Doret (2007, p. 28) outlines his view of flourishing, "I believe that human well-being consists of two aspects: the fulfilment of generic goods that are objectively identifiable and the meaningful interpretation of these goods by the individual in a way that is personally satisfactory." For Doret, human well-being or flourishing can only be identified when people have specific aptitudes but crucially the individual must be able to acknowledge this skill and identify it as a skill with value. Therefore if skills and aptitudes are not identified by a young person it is the role of adults to help them do this if they are to truly prosper.

In the Literary Review I will spend time considering the theories of a variety of scholars ranging from educational to business specialists. I will relate various viewpoints back to current educational social policy. This will allow us to consider a variety of the issues and arguments surrounding the subject of helping young people thrive.

In the main sections of the work I will begin by testing my hypothesis, that some subjects are valued higher than others by adults and that many young people are not able to prosper as their gifts are not being effectively nurtured. I will continue by reporting some of the information I have deduced from the qualitative research including how many young people consider education as important for finding future work and how many young people measure flourishing based on personal achievement. I will then make some suggestions as to what can help inspire and nurture abilities and gifts in young people, highlighting encouragement, opportunities to try new things and helping young people develop gifts that provide them with enjoyment and passion. I will finish the piece of work by drawing together my conclusions.

Reflexivity

As a Schools and Youth Worker I am deeply concerned about the flourishing of all young people. As a Christian I feel a compassion for young people who are marginalised either because they are labelled with things such as SEBD (Social, Emotional and Behaviour Difficulties) or SEND (Special Education Needs and Disability) or because they have no recognised or diagnosed struggles but feel ostracised purely because their learning styles or passions are not recognised as valuable.

In John 10.10 we see that God has a plan to bring full life to people, Pennington explains the biblical concept of Shalom often translated as peace. "God's saving work from the Fall to the New Creation can be accurately describes as God restoring the creational state of human flourishing" (2015, p. 7). My belief is that all people should be permitted and supported to contribute to human flourishing. I believe that there are obstacles within British Culture and the English Education System that do not permit individual achievement which can have a negative effect on society.

Literary Review

In this piece of work I will be referring to education broadly, rather than purely schooling, I am referring to the holistic education provided by youth workers and other educators. Education is something that affects and is affected by many issues including politics, ethics and economy. Marshall et al. suggests that, "Talent development and innovation are at the center of most nations' global strategies for sustainable prosperity." (2011, p. 17) Education is fervently debated by politicians because of the ramifications of the effectiveness of education.

Many countries are currently in the process of reforming their education systems. In the UK inclusion has become an explicit part of the National Curriculum. In the USA the No Child Left Behind Mandate has sought to ensure successes amongst all students. Freytag (2008) writes about how the American education system has an agenda to ensure that no child is marginalised, especially those with learning difficulties or those who struggle academically. Her critique of the current policy is that it, "tends to reflect a narrow view of excellence" (p. 131) namely the understanding of particular subjects rather than holistic education. Her premise is that the prevailing view appears to be that "there is

nothing wrong with the curriculum; it is the students that need to be 'fixed.'" (Freytag, 2008, p. 131)

Freytag is passionate about acknowledging all students' gifts and abilities to provide synergy and improve everybody's learning experiences. When diversity is valued, Freytag suggests, "Learners can realize the heights of educational excellence." (Freytag, 2008, p. 135) I perceive the issues that Freytag alludes to are not limited to America, the issues of subject value and narrow definitions of achievement are apparent in England too. For example, STEM subjects have been glorified by some educational politicians whilst Arts subjects have been devalued. The current education secretary appears to be less favourable to the arts for the education of students, "Last year, education secretary Nicky Morgan said that in previous decades, 'if you wanted to do something, or even if you didn't know what you wanted to do, then the arts and humanities were what you chose because they were useful for all kinds of jobs', but that 'we know now that couldn't be further from the truth – that the subjects that keep young people's options open and unlock the door to all sorts of careers are the STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths)'." (Flood, 2015)

Whilst conducting a pilot study for this study I was moved by the apparent dejectedness that was displayed by one of the young people when she expressed she felt like her skills and talents were non-existent, anything that she was good at she felt was unrecognised and undervalued. This mentality can reduce young people to something Freire describes as self-depreciation which stands in direct contrast to the self-actualisation promoted by Maslow (Pichère, 2015, p. 5),

> *"Self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything- that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive – that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness."* (Freire, 1996, p. 45)

Young people who have less traditional skills and abilities deserve recognition, support and to feel valued. This can only come through recognising, nurturing and honouring the achievements of young people regardless of their strengths.

Freire was notably critical of pedagogies that focused on imparting knowledge through traditional forms of teaching, "Narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into a 'container,' into 'receptacles' to be 'filled' by the teacher." (Freire, 1996, p. 52) Other writers allude to how convergent thinking, the method of thinking that requires individual answers to questions and single solutions to problems, has its place in our education system but it is not enough if we want young people to thrive. Robinson says that "Conformity has a higher value than diversity" (Robinson, 2009, p. 230) in our education system currently. Gardner who criticizes standardized testing shares a similar concern, "formal testing has moved far too much in the direction of assessing knowledge of questionable importance in ways that show little transportability." (Gardner, 1991, p. 134) The argument they make is that the testing culture that has permeated our education system is one that judges all young people based on learnt knowledge that they must retrieve in a decontextualized environment.

Wagner (2012) argues that motivation plays a large part in the learning of young people; there is a significant difference between young people learning enough to pass a standardised test and fascination, intrigue and passion drawing someone into an appetite for learning. "School is a game the Innovation Generation knows they have to play to get 'credentialed,' but they do it with as little effort as possible…They have dreams and ambitions that demand time and space – and active nurturing" (p. 19) This concept, Wagner suggests is relatively new. In the past people were satisfied knowing that our learning would be utilised in well paid, safe jobs and that were worth working towards but young people now approach learning for tests as a way into doing what they really want to do later. Ormrod speaks about the significance of intrinsic motivation in education suggesting that if we would like young people to continue learning with passion they need motivation. (Ormrod, 2008, pp. 384-386) Ormrod's view is that our education could be complementary to the ambitions, dreams and aptitudes of young people but currently is not.

Christodoulou (2014) is negative towards these points of view, stipulating that education should be no different in the 21st Century and that young people need more knowledge to develop their schemas if they are to thrive in competitive job markets. Her argument is that "Problem-solving, creative thinking, critical thinking and relating

to people are all incredibly important skills…But there is nothing uniquely twenty-first century about them. Mycenaean Greek craftsmen had to work with others, adapt and innovate." (Christodoulou, 2014, p. 52) Whilst this might be true, the education system in question is not the same as Ancient Greek education. British education is a relatively contemporary invention. When people talk about re-inventing our education system they are contrasting it with the education system founded in the 19th Century which had contrasting aims and purposes to those today. Wagner's argument goes further by saying that teaching knowledge to young people, to get qualifications, to demonstrate that they know a lot does not motivate young people and will not help them thrive. The motivation they need, he suggests will come from, "play, passion and purpose" (Wagner, 2012, p. 26) which he portrays as a maturing journey.

Play is indeed something divorced from learning facts to pass exams. Play is also something that Dewey advocated for, "it is important not to confuse the psychological distinction between play and work with the economic distinction….work which remains permeated with the play attitude is art – in quality if not in conventional designation." (Dewey, 2004, p. 198) Wagner's view that play can graduate into passion and purpose reflects Dewey's ideas. It is intriguing that these scholars challenge the dichotomy people make between work and play and argue that the two are intricately linked.

Christodoulou (2014, p. 22) shares about how Shakespeare's education enabled him to develop into an accomplished playwright, "Shakespeare's creative genius was in the way he used the knowledge he had gained. But it is very clear from this analysis that a fact-filled education did not stifle that genius; on the contrary, this education allowed that genius to flourish." What Christodoulou is suggesting here is that learning lots of facts and literary techniques enabled Shakespeare's skills to flourish. It is conceivable that if educators had identified his natural aptitude for creative writing, a broader knowledge of English Language could have been taught specifically to enable him and others with a similar gifting, to succeed even more. The reason Shakespeare achieved more than his peers was possibly not because he learnt facts better than his contemporaries, but because facts and knowledge were added to his natural talent to create beautiful poetry.

Christodoulou again challenges some contemporary pedagogy, "One of the strongest messages I received when I was training and beginning to teach was that I should not talk very much. I remember one teacher trainer telling me that if I was talking, the pupils were not learning." (2014, p. 30) Christodoulou is critical of this approach and it is perhaps unsubstantiated that children do not learn if a teacher is speaking. It might also be true that with a variety of learning styles, speaking from the front is not helpful for retention of information for some learners. Kinaesthetic and visual learners require very different learning environments to help them engage and thrive (LeFever, 2004). This is possibly a key purpose of OFSTED, to identify the need for teachers to minimise the amount of teacher instruction in lessons.

Earlier I mentioned the elevation of STEM subjects, added to this can be the recent promotion, by the education secretary, of the English Baccalaureate which extols traditional academic subjects. (Newbigin, 2015) There is perhaps much to be learned through the study of STEM subjects, the use of rote learning and building a satisfactory schema of learning. As Didau argues, "It's puzzling then that education seems to have uncritically accepted that imparting knowledge is bad." (Didau, 2015, p. 109) It might also be true that all young people are different with various dormant aptitudes. Focusing on STEM subjects will awaken those talents in some young people but not in others.

It is Robinson's view that "we need to eliminate the existing hierarchy of subjects...too many students pass through education and have their natural talents marginalised or ignored." (Robinson, 2009, p. 247) If this is happening globally then we risk demoralising young people, supporting exclusion and reducing self-confidence. This is not the education system our National Curriculum demands. The purpose of education according to the Department for Education is a curriculum, "which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils" (2014, p. 4) Education, according to the government starts from a place of holistically engaging, supporting and nurturing young people into the best people they can be.

Didau, an education commentator has another philosophy of education, "For the record, here's what I believe: education should exist to make children cleverer, no matter our

starting point." (Didau, 2015, p. 93) Learning is absolutely central to education, but learning facts and gaining knowledge is a small fraction of this development.

Caperon (2015) argues that since the 1950s there has been a decline in appropriate collective worship and Religious Studies

> *"It seems likely that academic subjects are seen by most teachers and pupils as separate silos of knowledge and skill...In effect, the nation's state minded non-church schools may now be offering a depleted education: one that lacks a unifying, comprehensive vision of life in all its fullness, of human flourishing"* (Caperon, 2015, p. 41)

Caperon concludes that a healthier spirituality amongst a school community can provide a suitable environment for young people to flourish and thrive.

Likewise Conner et al (2015) suggests it is, "possible that FV [fruit and vegetables] could promote a broader range of experiences that signal human flourishing" and that "fruit and vegetables consumption could also be associated with eudemonic behaviours including curiosity and creativity. (Conner, et al., 2015, pp. 414-415) This view and research helps understand how true holistic education can enhance the opportunities for young people to thrive, even peripheral details such as diet can impact the performance of young people.

Ways to Identify Skills and Abilities

I have been influenced by the works of Ken Robinson; his ideas inspired me to consider alternative methods for schooling and for helping young people develop and nurture their talents regardless of their personalities and skills. He refers to something called 'the element', an expression that is often used to describe a place where someone appears to be thriving, "The Element is the meeting point between natural aptitude and personal passion...doing the thing they love, and in doing it they feel like their most authentic selves." (Robinson, 2009, p. 21) He argues that this is often not something that is identified or nurtured in the school systems found in America or the UK. He does insist, however that "Often we need other people to help us recognise our real talents" (Robinson, 2009, p. 25) This I believe is a key function of teachers and youth workers to help young people spot their own talents, strengths and passions.

Marshall et al. highlights an approach to teaching that involves nurturing talent in young people who have a natural aptitude for STEM subjects. Some of the words used to describe their nurturing include encouraging "curiosity and inquiry" working towards competencies such as "Inquiry competencies: creative problem finding and solving" (Marshall, et al., 2011, p. 21) this emphasis on exploration and helping young people delve into experiences combines with the theories of Wagner who encourages exposing young people to experiences to see how young people engage with different experiences. If they show uncommon interest and fascination in something they might be longing to strive to develop their education in that particular area.

Gardner (2006, pp. 8-18) highlights a variety of intelligences that operate independently of one another, he does, however, explain that we use them together to perform varied tasks. He identifies the intelligences as: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, spatial, inter-personal and intra-personal. He is also concerned that "our educational system is heavily biased toward linguistic modes of instruction and assessment." (Gardner, 1991, p. 12) Which, he suggests, affords some students to be "unjustifiably deemed successes, as well as [creating] many needless casualties" (Gardner, 1991, p. 12)

His view is that all people have intelligences and these can be optimised, "Perhaps if we can mobilize the full range of human intelligences and ally them to an ethical sense we can help increase the likelihood of survival on our planet, and perhaps even contribute to our thriving." (Gardner, 2006, p. 24)

Methodology

I used a mixed mode methodology to enable a broad range of responses. The reason I chose this methodology was, as Fielding et al explains, "Mixed-mode data has a number of advantages. First is that the weaknesses of each mode can be offset by the strengths of another mode…Results validated by multiple modes have enhanced confidence and credibility." (2008, p. 544) With a variety of modes I was able to improve the validity of the data by comparing the results found across a variety of modes. I used a mixture of focus groups, online questionnaires and one-to-one interviews to conduct my research.

I also chose to collect my research from a variety of people from different demographics, different spheres of education and with a range of philosophies

regarding holistic education. This enabled me to gather results that could be generalised effectively. Data collected from this range of people also supported the validity of the data because I was able to make sure that what I was measuring was successfully considered. Sometimes answers participants gave were either misinterpreted or answered incorrectly, it was therefore helpful to have a wide number of responses and a variety of research methods to enable credible data analysis.

One of the strengths of my research was that I was able to gather the viewpoints of a large number of young people through local youth workers, having them select the young people was helpful because they know the young people and were able to put together a group of people to make a successful focus group. They were able to select a variety of people with a range of natural talents and abilities. This enabled good discussion and synergy amongst the young people. It also allowed my bias to be nullified in the process of selecting participants in that portion of the research, in other parts of the research the sampling was planned but in the focus groups formed by other leaders the sampling was chosen by the leaders. "because random selection typically yields the most representative sample of participants, it is among the most widely used methods of selecting participants" (Nezu & Nezu, 2008, p. 138) I sought to collect data from participants that represented young people as a whole in England.

My organised sampling was used particularly when selecting interviewees because I wanted to select people with varying skills and from different educational contexts to enable broad and balanced data. These included, two German students recently having left the school system in Germany. One of them said she had a natural talent for art while the other was more academically intelligent. Conducting research with some foreign people from a different culture enabled me to diversify my data making it more accurate. I did, however have to interview one of these two girls online using a video link. Not meeting in person may have had a negative impact on the interview but I felt the interview was successful despite that. Sending out the questions to the interviewees before the interviews was beneficial as it enabled them to prepare their answers although I did explain to them that there would be clarifying questions and that I would very likely add in some questions dependent upon their responses. A man I interviewed had been home schooled and is now in his 30s. I wanted to speak with him about his experiences to contrast again with the experiences of people in mainstream UK

education. I interviewed the Head teacher of a faith school where I conducted a questionnaire and I also visited and spoke with the overseer of a Montessori pre-school and elementary school. Having two different educational professionals provided my research with different points of view. The sole young person I interviewed was passionate about drama and performance studies, I chose to interview her because her school had recently dropped Drama GCSE meaning she could not take the subject but also because she had, through social media, challenged the social policy surrounding the government's plans to introduce the English Baccalaureate which meant her argument was integral to my discussion topic.

One of the benefits of the semi-structured interviews format was, as Heath et al. explain, "the person being interviewed is free to explore other issues which may be equally relevant to the topic being explored, even if the connections are not always straightforwardly transparent to the researcher." (Heath, et al., 2009, pp. 80-81) I found that some of the responses that the interviewees provided were illuminating and helped me shape some new conclusions.

To provide the opportunity to compare between secular and faith based education I split the results between one online survey and the other results I gathered from my pilot study questionnaire and from the focus groups. This enabled me to compare whether being in a faith based environment affected how valued student felt their gifts and talents were. The negative part of this was there was a slight overlap between up to 4 students that may have been included in both a focus group and a questionnaire. The struggle with the questionnaire was that I had little control over who took part in the research. This was due to the fact that I approached the faith school and asked them to administrate the process of sending out consent forms and information about the research. The school then allowed all of the 24 individuals that responded to the invitation to complete the online survey in school time. To encourage students to partake in the study I led an assembly at the school promoting the research, this was very successful and helped the students understand the purpose of the study and how they could impact it.

One of the benefits of the mixed mode approach in my research was that I was able to use quantitative and qualitative methods to serve two purposes. Firstly, the quantitative

research enabled me to test my hypotheses that a number of subjects, skills and abilities are valued over others and that some young people were not being able to reach their potential and flourish as their gifts were not being effectively nurtured. Secondly, the qualitative research allowed me to deduce some new theories that I could not have considered at the start of the research. It enabled me to make my research broad and all encompassing, as Benz highlights, "for the qualitative researcher, the motivating purpose is theory building; while for the quantitative researcher, the intent is theory testing…both are needed to conceptualize research holistically." (1998, p. 20) Another benefit of the mixed mode approach was that I was able to be both distant and in close proximity to a significant number of the participants. As a researcher I am aiming to develop as a reflexive practitioner and therefore I am aware that both my involvement in the face to face research and the data analysis can be skewed by my own biased views. I have sought to overcome this by using the variety of research methods and choosing participants with varied points of view. In the focus groups the use of flash cards served as a good opening activity that had little input from the researcher.

One of the difficulties I faced when conducting Focus groups was gathering full, coherent stories from individuals as there were many voices in the room and it became difficult to focus on individuals, Barbour explains, "The nature of focus group discussions means that stories are unlikely to unfold sequentially, as they can do in a one-to-one interview." (2011, p. 18) It was therefore necessary to ensure that I made room for a number of interviews to gather articulate stories which I could clarify and discuss with people in a relaxed, quiet environment rather than potentially hectic focus groups.

The focus groups did, however, provide a place for many young people to work together to answer questions. It was particularly helpful in one focus group which had a number of shy people who did not like speaking out loud. They were able to speak to their neighbours and write information down of paper. Barbour (2011, p. 19) highlights how focus groups can enable participants who might feel overwhelmed in a one-to-one environments to contribute, this was my experience. The other benefit, as mentioned by Litosseliti, (2007, p. 17) is that they allowed me to work with a wide variety of people while expending fewer resources. In total I worked with forty young people across five focus groups.

The benefits of using the questionnaire were that the participants were free to answer freely without any intervention, it also enabled me to gather clear quantifiable data and make good comparisons. I do however understand that, as Dawson highlights, "if the research were to be conducted with another group of people the results might not be the same." (2002, pp. 47-48) It is hard to know whether the respondents are interpreting your questions effectively. Another limitation was I was only able to collect 36 questionnaires when I had hoped to collect 50 this will have an effect upon the validity of the data. However, the information can be combined with the other research methods and can provide some supporting data when added to forty focus group respondents and six interviewees.

One of the largest benefits of using face-to-face approaches was that I was able to clarify answers, for example, when I asked young people which skills were valued most, sometimes their answers were nuanced and it was helpful to find out why they believe skills were valued more or less. The questionnaires provided no space for this conversation providing crude data alone. As Boyle & Schmierbach suggest "the primary advantages of this (face to face) approach are that the interviewer can develop a strong rapport, interpret nonverbal communication for contextual data, and provide clarification or probing when needed." (2015, p. 249)

I sought to begin the research early so that I could negotiate with relevant gate keepers that could influence the data collection. I tried to get access to a preparatory school and a local state school to meet with teaching staff and provide questionnaires for students but the schools were not able to accommodate me for the research purpose. However, because I had starting contacting gatekeepers early I was still able to collect a significant amount of data from other sources. I am aware that my research would have been more reliable if I had been able to gather questionnaires from a larger sample size but time and resources were unavailable. To ensure that this did not affect the validity of my findings I mostly used the information gathered from the questionnaires to back up the findings in the interviews and focus groups. Examples of my questionnaire, focus group activities and interviews can be found in the Appendix section.

Main Sections

1. **The Value of Skills**

Value Placed on Skills

Part of my hypothesis was that I believed some abilities were valued higher than others. I was unsure of whether young people experienced this or felt like certain strengths they bestowed were recognised. Many of the young people that I spoke with described how they felt some abilities were favoured more than others. The exhortation that came from one group during a focus group was, "Things [strengths and abilities] should be valued equally amongst all things." They were describing the frustration that they had regarding how some skills are given more credence. It could be, and indeed has been, argued that there are significant benefits to developing certain skills in specific subjects which would vindicate this hierarchy of subjects but the issue is broader and less simple as it might appear. Through the research I have found that the value placed on subjects has an impact upon both how much young people value the skills and their self-esteem. The latter can have significant psychological and emotional affects upon young people. One girl in a focus group felt like she had no skills, she felt unvalued, her skills were Cooking, Cleaning and Design and her demeanour communicated that she was undervalued. Similarly, a German woman I interviewed shared her feelings from her Secondary School in Germany, part of an education system that appears to be in a state of flux currently as the competition between Hauptschule, Realschule and Gymnasium has become less about the ideal fit for students and more about economy and progression, "In the first few years of secondary school there was a time when I thought I didn't have any talents, I had never found a subject that I was one of the best, I thought I am not intelligent, this was the time when I thought why should I live?...It would have been good if people showed me talents before." This student experienced unhappiness and low self-esteem due to her skills and strengths not being identified and nurtured. This woman later disclosed that it was not until she was 16 or 17 that she began to recognise her talent for Art, unfortunately due to her school system, as she explained there is a stigma against the Realschule, the Gymnasium didn't have music and art often, despite her acknowledging she had received "very good marks at music and art." Speaking about science she commented on how she "liked the practical side of science"

adding how they "always had two teachers in science at once." This shows how Science has been given a higher value than other subjects because more resources were designated in Science than in other subjects.

Another German woman expressed similar struggles explaining how "the system is just not designed for some subject groups" it appears that the German education system has drawn people towards Gymnasium education for students who want to progress successfully but this educational model promotes academic learning at the expense of promoting other skills.

Several students sought to defend some of their preferred skills and subjects. Out of the subjects that students sought to defend, Art and Drama were highlighted most frequently.

There was a consensus that these subjects in particular have value but that it is not recognised by adults. One young person who was talented in Graphic Design explained how adults say, "[it's] only drawing" insinuating that drawing is not an important skill, another student complained about how adults say art is, "not going to help you in life, more a hobby, they [adults] say that it's not as important as Maths, English and Science…I enjoy it, I think it's quite important." One young person said she felt Drama was not valued highly mentioning how it is "not seen as academic" but in defence of Drama's benefits and transferable skills her self-awareness helped her reflect upon how "Leading a team is connected to drama, it's confidence, creativity…understanding culture again comes from drama [and] being a Christian helps with this." The latter young person recently argued against the social policy that has promoted the English Baccalaureate as it appears to have given value to academic subjects at the expense of other subjects. This self-reflection and passion that young people are displaying shows courage and understanding that equality of skills and abilities should be provided.

It was apparent, however, that special emphasis was put upon specific subjects at different schools. One young person explained how being at a Performance Arts Specialism School she has music twice a week in year 7 and as a result of this she felt that Music, Dance and Drama are highly valued.

One of the ways students appeared to display how value is placed on certain skills was their reasoning about the purpose and philosophy of education. One student explained

how she felt Dance, Gymnastics and Sport were under-valued. Asked why she felt this she claimed, the "government are looking for more intelligent people." I explained the view point of Howard Gardner earlier in this document, that everyone is intelligent and there are indeed multiple intelligences, in our culture, however, intelligence has become synonymous with IQ scores, logical and verbal intellect. The response of this young person highlights the effects of such arrangements and designations. Throughout the research many participants expressed similar understandings and feelings; I was unsure how the young people had come to believe these viewpoints. Why do they believe that adults and officials want more academic success and specific, measurable skills?

In the bible it summarises the importance of people's uniqueness and individuality and how God can use all people for amazing purposes. In Romans 12.6-8 Paul mentions a variety of different gifts that different people have and throughout his writings he passionately argues that we all have separate gifts but we must share them as they all are necessary and have equal value, "the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable." (1 Corinthians 12:22)

Skills for the Work Place

Many of the students made a relationship between how valued they felt skills were with how helpful they might be in finding future work. One participant gifted in Maths and Drama said, "I feel like people respect you more if you have a good understanding [of Maths] and value you more as a person. Also it is useful for when you are getting a job" in comparison the participant said of Drama, "some people think that Drama isn't very useful but others do. Also, I think it's good but some people don't think it can help in life." Young people are acutely aware of the dichotomy between academic subjects and non-academic subjects. They also have adopted beliefs regarding which skills and subjects enable them to find work in the future. These understandings often appear unfounded suggesting they reflect the views of adults in positions of authority. One young person talked about what skills were valued purely on whether the skills could help him get a job, "IT programmers get jobs where they're paid a lot." Concerning 'leading a team' he answered, "Lots of jobs need this... [Also being] musical can get you a good job if you make it. Graphic design could get quite a good job but you don't have any

lessons in it" This understanding of skills and their application in a workplace show convergent thinking. That the skills gained can only be applied directly to a specific job.

During the research I found that many young people have developed the perception that the purpose of education is to learn a set of skills to apply directly to a job. Either that is true or this perception is the view of adults and is communicated to young people. This rigid view of education can be restricting for young people preventing them from reaching their full potential. If this is the representative view that young people have of education the National Curriculum's endorsement of educating young people holistically has been neglected.

Another student spoke with antipathy as they related how adults do not appreciate creative or movement skills, "[when] adults ask what I want to do [for an occupation, they are] not impressed – adults don't appreciate creative stuff" about sport they related, "adults think of it as a joke, [it's] not valued very much, maybe if it was in a specialist [sport] school it would be good" This describes a culture that does not recognise a variety of talents, skills and abilities.

Other young people had similarly made assumptions about how beneficial individual skills might be in finding work. They had deduced value according to the amount of resources available for different subjects. For example, one of the German women mentioned how she had always had two teachers in her Science classes as opposed to one teacher in other classes. Another young person felt that music was undervalued because at school they, "only do music once a fortnight" this had led this individual to conclude that, in music there are, "not as many jobs as studying maths, [in] drama [there are a] few jobs you can get…[in] poetry you can't get tons of jobs" these assumptions show that students are not given an understanding of the purpose of education they are generally left to conclude that education exists to prepare young people for the workplace. Duckworth & Tummons highlight where this viewpoint may be found in political realms, "the purpose of education, according to this political and economic perspective, is to prepare people for the world of work." They are quick to ascertain how "a focus on education for work positions education as a commodity." (2010, p. 65) Again this is not the education system envisioned by the National Curriculum and this viewpoint does not seek to support inclusion agendas or holistic development.

It is deducible that young people don't know what jobs are available or how they can get to them, but they do want jobs and regularly think about them. This is a central issue and one which is reflected in scripture, in Ephesians 2.10 the understanding is that, as people created by God, we are created for, "good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life." In Jeremiah we are told that God's plans are good! If young people are aware of this it can help them find direction and hope. As a Christian I believe that all young people should be given support to help them find suitable work.

Personal Achievement

25% of survey respondents (from a sample of 24 people – the table can be found in Appendix G) claimed that a sense of personal achievement was their highest motivation for working, 20.83% said they were motivated by future rewards such as high grades or future work. Young people are concerned about their futures and many want to work hard for themselves, but, as Wagner (2012) has suggested, people need intrinsic motivation if we want to help them focus and reach their full potential. Education should not leave young people directionless but motivated towards becoming the best they can be. My research has uncovered that even people that the current education system benefits are not motivated by the system but are doing what they need to do to progress. One interviewee made a distinction between the grade assessments and her own personal assessment. She explained how her own view of how much she had achieved was not measured in the way she perceived success was measured by schools despite achieving very high grades across a variety of subjects. When she spoke of achievement in school she spoke of, "knowledge [of] how to handle special situations, stress, pressure, to learn about yourself, to go beyond yourself, and to find your natural skills (e.g. communication, work in a team, organization etc.)" Achievement here appears broader than gaining high grades through passing standardised tests.
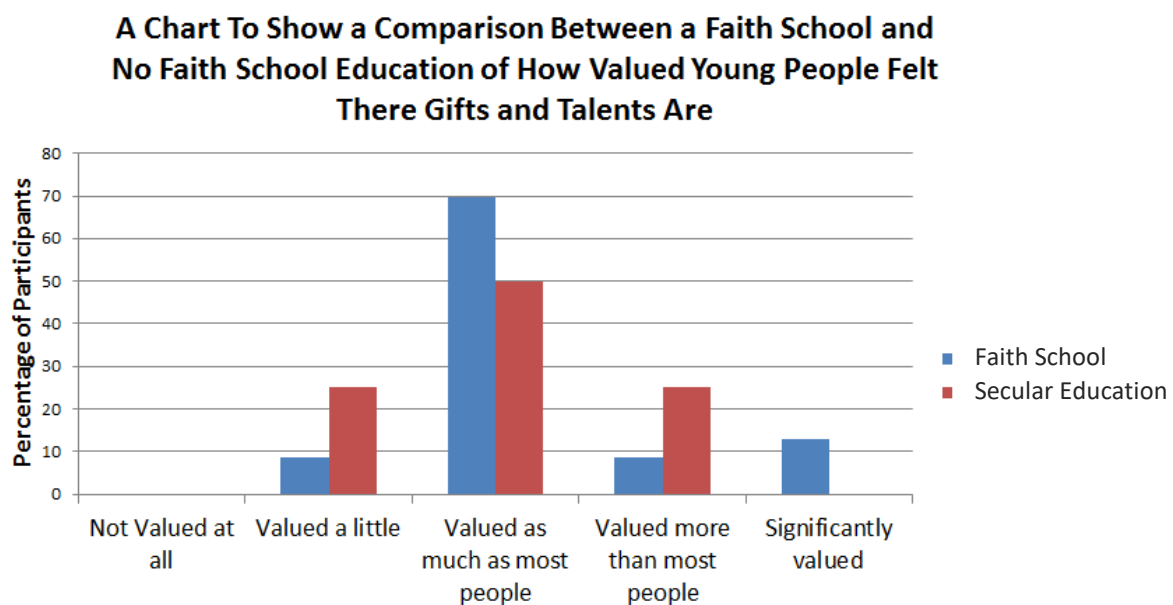
Different Skills Valued in Different Contexts

I have mentioned briefly the fact that some subjects appeared to be valued differently in different educational contexts. This is particularly true with schools which have specialisms where students perceive that a higher value is, perhaps naturally, placed upon the skills that relate to the school's specialist subjects.

It was interesting to note that there was noticeable difference in the value placed on a variety of skills in a Christian Faith School compared with young people from other educational contexts.

Firstly, it was observable that generally, more students felt their gifts and talents were valued highly in the faith school compared with students elsewhere. This table shows the comparison. It is encouraging that most students believed their skills were valued but only in the Faith School did students feel their skills were significantly valued.

Chart A

A Chart To Show a Comparison Between a Faith School and No Faith School Education of How Valued Young People Felt There Gifts and Talents Are

When comparing the skills that young people said they felt were valued by adults, there was a marked difference between the results from the Independent Christian School and those educated in secular education. Some of the subjects that the young people felt were valued little in state schools were judged to be more valued in the faith school. This is reflected in the charts B and C overleaf. In chart B (conducted with various students) we see that Maths, team work and leading a team are valued highly, whereas in the faith school (chart C), Maths is apparently not valued highly but Cooking, autonomy and Art take precedence. Drama, Music and Dance, however, all score poorly across the entirety of the results. When I spoke with the Head Teacher of the faith school, he told me how his school was unable to accommodate some learning activities, such as in Physical Education, due to limited resources adding, "We can only offer so

much…you are able to evaluate the kids' performance in relation to what's offered." The school was limited in some ways due to resources which meant that some skills and abilities could not be nurtured. This might also explain why some of the students felt their skills were not noticed or realised. When I spoke with the leader of a Montessori School she spoke of how "the one thing we don't have is a large school hall, I would love to have a great big indoor area to promote physical education so this is something we have to find out of the setting." This challenge is summarised well in the words of the Faith School educator, "If you don't offer in the curriculum, how will you know if the pupils are able to [excel in subjects]?" Some skills are likely to be left undeveloped and unrealised purely due to lack of resources.

Charts B & C - Tables Showing the Value Young People
Believed was Placed upon Skills Outside and Inside a Faith School
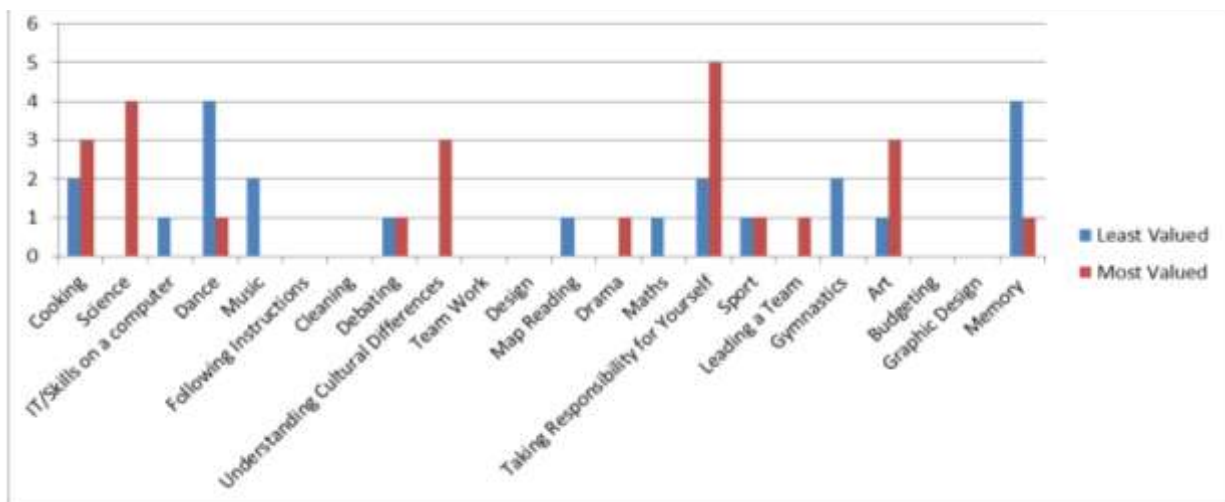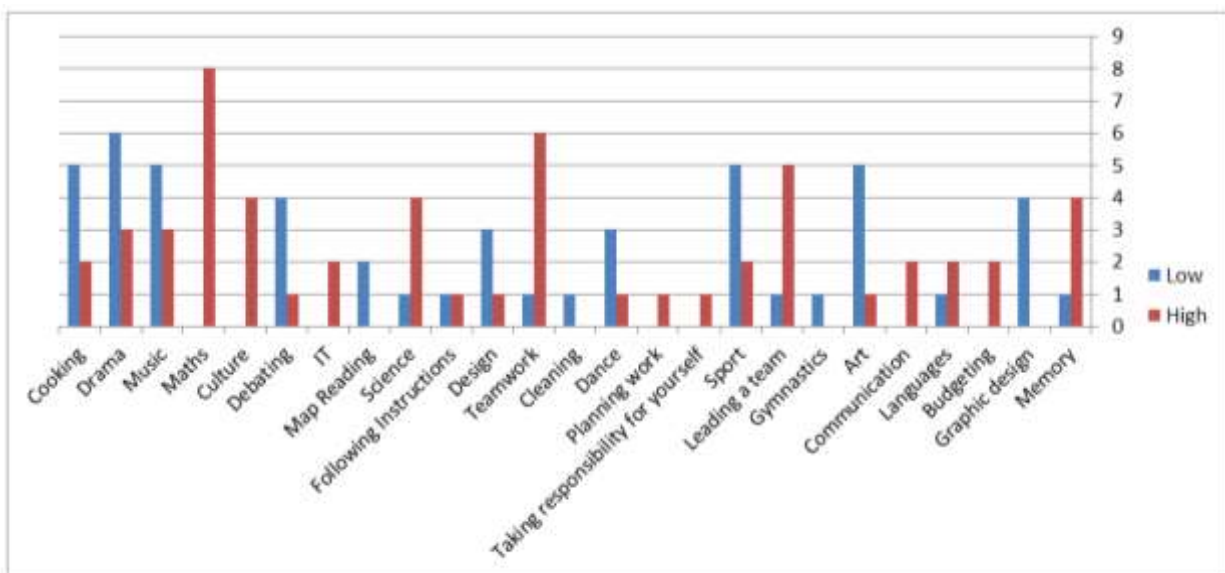
2. <u>**Ways to Inspire and Nurture Abilities and Gifts**</u>

The purpose of this research was not purely to test a hypothesis, that some skills and therefore some students are undervalued, although I perceive that the results are indicative of that assessment. The purpose of the study was also to find ways to respond positively to this lack of equality and help all young people flourish. At this point I will document the recommendations young people gave to help them thrive.

There were a variety of ways young people described that could help them develop and nurture their skills and abilities. During data analysis it became apparent that there were three themes that presented themselves. Firstly, encouragement, particularly from parents, teachers and friends has a massive impact upon helping people identify their skills and also gives them confidence to develop and nurture these skills. Secondly, providing people with opportunities to try new things and providing experiences can help young people see if they are good at those activities. Finally, participants often claimed that they do well and develop significantly in skills and activities that they like and enjoy.

Encouragement

In a letter to her Art Teacher, one of the participants said, "I'd like to thank my art teacher for encouraging me to draw and helping me to develop my skills. Before I had him as my teacher I never felt very good at art" this demonstrates the power that encouragement from adults can have on the self-esteem of young people. Without that encouragement that student may not have recognised her gift for a long time. With encouragement this young person developed her self-esteem and in the process was able to develop her gift.

One student asked if it might be possible to receive "more 'even better if' feedback and less criticism" feeling that the positivity and encouragement could help them develop more as their confidence was able to grow. In the Bible the exhortation to encourage and build people up is clear. (Ephesians 4.29; 1 Thessalonians 5.11) Encouragement is necessary to help people reach their potential.

This young person explains the benefit of encouragement and support from teachers and parents, "Teachers help me with ideas [and] my mum helps me…my mum always drew and coloured in things with me, she helped me express myself and I loved it, so I'm

now in high school, I have chosen to take fine art, and textiles. This has helped me so much." This shows that skills and abilities can be encouraged and developed in the home, in informal educational environments.

One student explained how it "really motivates you when a teacher says you are really good at something" this person also felt encouraged as her teacher had sent other students to get help from her so she could teach and help fellow students Gibson and Knowler (2007) acknowledges how "you should take every opportunity to celebrate success with the children in your class, with the whole school, with parents and with the entire school community to develop the sense that every person in the school makes a valuable contribution to the success of the school" (p. 119) If everybody has something to contribute they can feel valued and their gifts can grow and develop effectively.

A Montessori School Manager highlighted a similar insight, "Positivity supports emotional wellbeing and comforts people knowing they can achieve something with supportive friends and teachers." Positivity and encouragement can work together to create an ethos and culture where self-esteem and self-actualisation can be cultivated.

Providing Opportunities and Experiences

Participants said that providing opportunities for them to explore new activities and skills enabled identification and development of gifts.

One girl mentioned how taking part in a Duke of Edinburgh award had helped her identify a teamwork gift, she said it, "helped me spot it and develop it." Other young people shared about how they were "introduced" to a variety of activities and one person mentioned how "encouraging after school clubs" would help young people develop skills and abilities. Another young person talked of their frustration about how she felt they got, "help with compulsory subjects but less help with optional modules." I might suggest that this issue relates back to my hypothesis regarding how some skills and subjects are valued more than others. If you are offered more support in specific subjects young people are likely to develop perceptions surrounding the value that is placed upon those skills. I also suggest more support should be available across all educational areas.

When opportunities and experiences are unavailable to young people this can be challenging. For example, I interviewed a young adult who had been home schooled up to age 16. He shared how many opportunities were not available to him. In his education he was forced to use books a lot, he claimed "everything became an English comprehension exercise" which enabled him to realise and cultivate a talent for English but his strongest subjects were recognised mainly through a process of elimination.

A young adult looked fondly upon the activities that shaped her as a teenager highlighting "after school clubs…school newspaper. [I] learned I am really interested in journalism." She shared how her teacher's encouragement to take part in the school newspaper had led her towards partaking in the activity. She expressed how she had always appreciated adults "giving…opportunities." This example shows a combination of both adult encouragement and provision of extra-curricular opportunities.

Another adult spoke of how a "new environment helped me find a new skill." Demonstrating clearly how context and environment can aid the process of helping people realise their potential. One young person was nostalgic about the quantity of creative writing her school had offered, "We did a lot of creative writing, I just kept writing and writing and writing…I was so engrossed in it being in another world" this appears reminiscent of Play Theory where children are, "often engrossed in it and more concerned with the play itself than the end result. Play is not literal – it has a make-believe quality. Play is flexible. It has the power to enhance normal development and alleviate abnormal behaviour." (Henderson & Thompson, 2011, p. 559) This also relates to the views of Dewey and Wagner, both advocates of play and its role in in education. Similar to the views of Gardner, Else (2009, p. 136) speaks of Play as a human intelligence and should be something we promote to help people make sense of the world. The young person, who was engrossed in playful creative writing, said, the way adults could help her identify skills and talents would be to, "Encourage me to try new things, step out of my comfort zone."

Enjoyment Leading to Development

Thirdly, a large proportion of participants made reference to how they succeed more in subjects and skills when they find enjoyment or pleasure from the activity. The Montessori Manager said, "Allowing someone to practice, repeat and refine something

they are naturally interested in will nurture their natural talents." In the Christian Faith School the Head Teacher spoke of how students "demonstrate...their competence" If young people are focussing hard on a particular project or piece of work their skills will be noticed and they can be helped to practice those skills.

A student passionate about art explained how she has, "always liked it... [you] do better if you like it." The following response suggests that the opposite can be true as well; there can be something efficacious about competence which can instil a passion and enjoyment, "when I like something I [am] able to concentrate on it...I love it when I am able to achieve something; when I notice I am good at something I start to like it."

A student who enjoyed and succeeded in Biology spoke of how "things you are passionate about you are generally good at." To help her identify her gifts and talents she said she "would delete all the subjects I didn't enjoy" to avoid "learning and forgetting." Her premise was that she learnt a lot at school to pass tests which she was successful in, but she felt she had not learnt a lot apart from in subjects she had become passionate about. Her conclusion was poignant, "[it is] better to have lots of subjects where you can learn something." This individual was someone who appeared to thrive in the education system but was open about how she felt it had also failed her. Gardner appears to reflect well the view of this student, "even successful students sense that their apparent knowledge is fragile at best" (Gardner, 1991, p. 6)

Someone with a passion for drama spoke eloquently of her experience, "It's what I'm good at and what I enjoy and I'm passionate about it." Throughout the research it became apparent that passion, enjoyment and competence were complementary and invariably inseparable. This is reminiscent of Robinson's theory of the Element (Robinson, 2009, p. 21) which I highlighted in the literary review. As passion and skills intertwine young people are able to succeed and flourish.

Similar to providing opportunities, some young people spoke of how exposure to certain experiences enabled them to identify, develop and master innate skills. One participant spoke of how she had become good at performance art because she has a musical background; good at Drama because she watched a lot of drama and dance because she has been involved in dance since she was two years old.

Another participant spoke of how play enabled him to notice transferrable or abstract skills. Playing cricket and chess he found it helped him, "nurture logical thought, leadership skills, and social skills." He was able to reflect upon how sport and games helped him provide structure and foundations to creativity. He related this to how studying the rules and grammar of English helped him create a framework for creativity as well.

3. <u>Helping Young People Feel Valued Can Help Them Succeed</u>

Finally, returning to my initial hypothesis about how I considered some skills are valued over others, some young participants shared how they felt education should have "less focus on academic stuff" and how adults "care more about Maths and English." one participant spoke of how, "If they [the general public] find out you are good at art [I] feel put down" If these are the responses people are making I consider it extremely important for educators and adults to address this hierarchy of skills.

If there are young people who feel undervalued because of their passions for non-academic subjects it might also be true that people with valuable vocational skills might also feel unappreciated. This can be identified in the responses of the student with natural skills in Design, Cooking and Cleaning that I referred to previously. Gardner is passionate about ensuring people are provided with appropriate conditions for their natural skills to flourish,

> *"Sometimes students who cannot pass muster on the usual measures of competence reveal significant mastery and understanding when these have been elicited in a different, more appropriate way. One finds intimations everywhere of the familiar disjunction between the literate person who can read the instructions perfectly but cannot assemble the machine and the illiterate person who can determine at a glance just where every part fits."* (Gardner, 1991, p. 14)

All skills have value and all people have skills, it is necessary that we support young people by helping them recognise their gifts and providing space to help them optimize their skills.

Chart D shows the perceptions of 36 young people of what they think help them to be successful in their strongest school subjects. It shows that two of the most common

reasons participants gave for being successful in their strongest subjects were a natural competence and enjoyment, with 22.2% of young people claiming enjoying a subject helped them succeed. This complements the qualitative research I have outlined at length earlier in my findings. The third highest response is about encouragement from a teacher which also complements the qualitative research. It does, however contradict the response given by a school Head Teacher who claimed "children learn best when teaching is stimulating...[if you]capture imagination...get their interest." This approach and methodology may show benefits but according to the views of young people this is not the best way that people learn. Perhaps inspiration and acknowledgement of individual aptitudes can be amalgamated to provide more successful classroom environments as Fisher(2003, p. 7) agrees with the view that stimulating teaching helps students learn, "classroom research in schools supports the view that students are better motivated and more engaged in classes they find intellectually stimulating. They like teachers who make them think."

Chart D - A Chart to Show Ways Students Highlighted That Helped Them Succeed in Their Strongest Subject at School
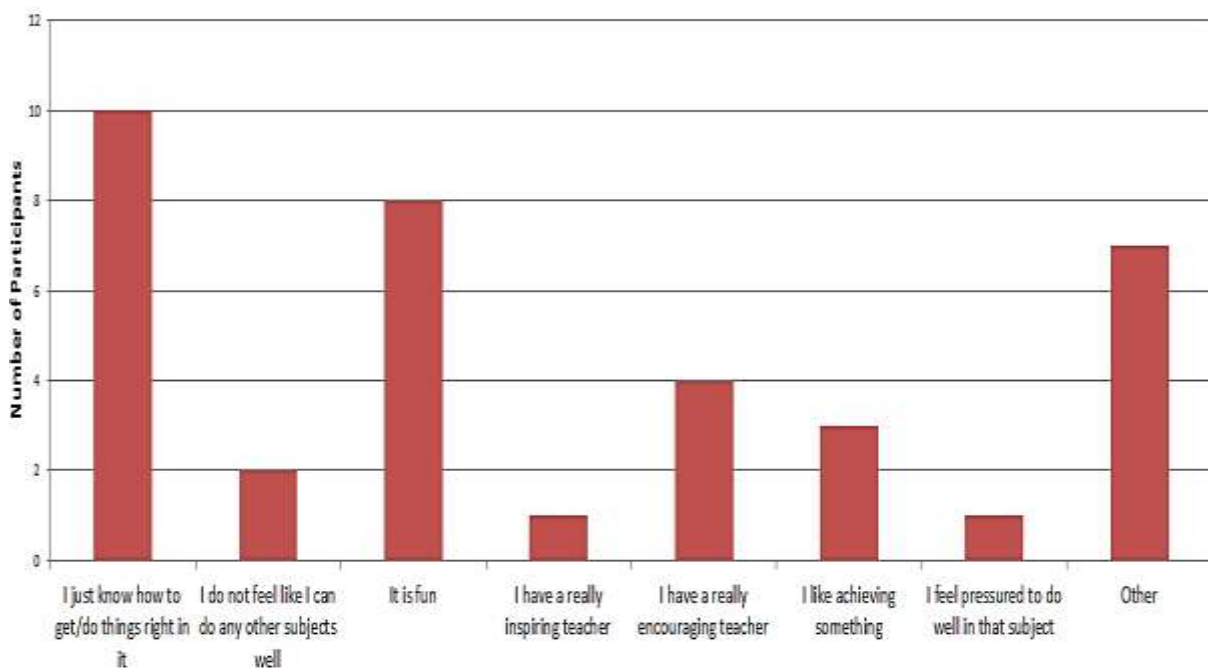
Ways to Help Young People Optimize Their Skills

Chart E - A Chart to Show Which Variables Helped
Young People Work Well
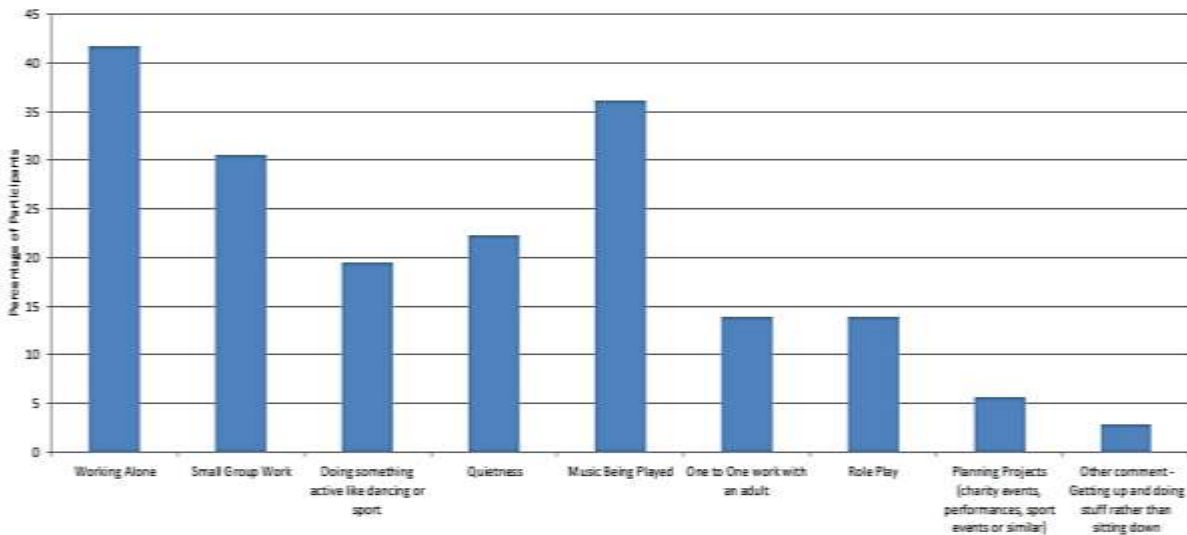
This chart shows that there are a variety of ways that young people find conducive to a good working environment; there should be a mix of these available to help young people learn and achieve their best. This has similarities to children having different learning styles, the Head Teacher of a Christian School spoke about how important it is to cater for varied learning styles, and also highlighted the benefits of working in groups. The person who was home schooled spoke of how there were some skills that needed to be developed with others but also talked about how working alone enabled him to develop concentration skills. This data shows that there are multiple ways we can support young people to learn, achieve and develop.

Conclusion

In this piece of work I have sought to test the hypothesis that some skills and abilities are valued over other skills. I have found that, whether this is intentional or not, many young people feel this is true and this affects self-esteem and life choices.

Young people are all different and they must be acknowledged for their individual strengths and talents. As Robinson, speaking about education, suggests "we need to challenge what we take for granted about our abilities and the abilities of other people." (Robinson, 2009, p. 30) When speaking with a teacher who has great art skills she reflected with great disappointment on an art project she had organised at school. She

could not understand how the children's art was, in her opinion, substandard. She recalled how well she had been able to do art at the same age and presumed that everyone would be able to produce similar work. We all have specific gifts and talents and we are sometimes unaware of the extent of these gifts even into adulthood. Educators have a wonderful opportunity to help young people notice and develop their natural talents for the benefit of whole communities.

The purpose of education, according to the National Curriculum, is to help the development of young people, not merely mentally but in a holistic way. Educators have a responsibility to ensure young people feel valued and cared for. Education's purpose, I believe, is not predominantly to prepare young people for work. This appears, however, to be the view of education that is held by some scholars and by many young people. Neither is education purely about learning lots of information, although this has its merits. If our education system is to succeed in providing inclusive and revolutionary education, it must seek to respond to the skills and abilities that young people harbour. By helping young people appreciate their gifts, find their passions and providing opportunities to grow in these areas, we can help all young people find fulfilment.

Inspiring and engaging education can help young people get interested in subject content, to help them learn, but ultimately providing new, regular experiences for young people can help them to display and notice innate skills and qualities. It can also help them to develop passion and as they begin to enjoy activities, their commitment to work can increase, as can their competence. Young people can become engrossed in their learning as they play and find purpose in what they are doing. Young people need freedom to flourish; the Playwork Principles highlight the innate desire to play but also that it is "freely chosen" (Hampshire County Council, n.d.) If we can provide space for young people to passionately and intensely immerse themselves in the skills they enjoy and excel in, then I believe they will be able to succeed to the best of their ability.

I have found the theories of Howard Gardner very influential in this study and his view is that "in nearly every student there is a five-year-old 'unschooled' mind struggling to get out and express itself." (Gardner, 1991, p. 5) As we seek to help young people flourish in their lives we can help them by awakening and broadening their natural talents and passions. I believe all young people have incredible potential and

intelligence, it is the responsibility of parents, educators and friends to help them realise their skills. As a Christian I believe that people are made in the image of God (Genesis 1.27) and that all people are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139.14a) I believe all young people are created to do amazing things and should be supported to be able to exercise their God given talents and gifts. No gift or skill is less important than any other and all are necessary. In the book of Isaiah a beautiful picture illustrates how "We are the clay, and you [God] are our potter" (Isaiah 64:8a). We can all be shaped, as individuals, to serve and to succeed in our distinct and exceptional ways.

Young people are concerned about work in the future and what they need to achieve to ensure they are prepared for job seeking. If we can help them find and develop their gifts and talents throughout their childhood they will be better prepared for job seeking and will be more able to apply themselves in jobs which enable them to thrive. This issue of job seeking and how we can best prepare young people for work does require, however, some further research and study. There should be further investigation into how we can identify the skills and abilities young people might need specifically for jobs they are striving for. It also might be beneficial to research which basic skills and subject knowledge can help most young people thrive without loading them with excessive knowledge.

Many young people highlighted the importance of encouragement in helping them develop and nurture their skills. As educators we can provide environments where positivity and encouragements are genuinely issued, regularly. This can help young people's self-esteem and help them notice their skills before developing them.

I conclude with the words of one of the people I interviewed, "Let people experience a lot…not forcing people into something…let them try new things…always believe in people and tell them that…you should support them…even if you don't like what they're doing." Young people have an incredible capacity to take risks, to change culture and to succeed. It is incumbent that we provide them with the freedom, opportunities and encouragement to find their 'element' so they can thrive and flourish in their whole lives.

Word Count - 10,748

Appendices

Appendix A - Interview with Pre School Manager

Questions for interview
In your view, how do children learn best?
Through a very individualised and holistic way. Children should be given
the opportunity to work in a clam environment with few distractions to
promote concentration, to enable collaborative skills with peers and enable
cognition.

What is a typical day like for your children in education?
Every day brings something different, children come in with new and exciting
ideas that they wish to learn about.
The materials are always on open shelves which provide free access to the
children.

Would you say that your education helps children to identify their natural
strengths and abilities?
All the materials are presented to individual children on a 1:1 basis, this
is an opportunity to demonstrate new skills/concepts to a child, and
provides the teacher with knowledge of children's strengths and abilities.
It can highlight opportunities to re-present an activity or indicate a child
has refined the new skill and can move on to something a little more
challenging.

How did your education help you identify your strengths?
This is quite difficult to look back on after so many years. I left school
in the mid 1980's and education was quite different back then. I was not
really shown anything that would have helped me to identify any strengths.
It was further education that made me realise my interest in childcare was
to become somewhat of a passion, and this passion led me to opening my own
school.

Are there some skills and abilities that you think are not realised in your
school for any reason?
The one thing we don't have is a large school hall, I would love to have a
great big indoor area to promote physical education so this is something we
have to find out of the setting.

What is the role of play and creativity in your education?
I believe play is an essential part of every child's life and vital to their
development. It is the way children explore the world around them and
develop and practice a variety of skills. Play is essential for physical,
emotional and spiritual growth, for intellectual and educational
development, and for acquiring social and behavioural skills.
Creativity comes from within and this skill can mean different things from
person to person. It can mean being imaginative, original and intentive
whilst being able to take risks as well as showing creative talent through
an artistic flare. There are open opportunities for children to develop and
demonstrate their creative side.

In your opinion what ways can people help children identify and nurture
their natural talents and abilities?
By allowing them to be free spirits. Positivity supports emotional
wellbeing and comforts people knowing they can achieve something with
supportive friends and teachers.
Allowing someone to practice, repeat and refine something they are naturally
interested in will nurture their natural talents. Whilst providing
opportunities to help this grow with new ideas that will support this.

Appendix B – Interview with a Young Person

Questions for interview

Describe your education experience in 3 minutes

What is a typical day like for you in education?

What are your strongest subjects? Choose some from the pack

Understanding Cultures – "being respectful of other cultures…I am very non-judgemental"

Following Instructions – "can be used in every work place"

 said she felt Drama was not valued highly adding "not seen as academic"

Leading a team – "shows organisation and problem solving…in mock interview adults said this
is a big thing interviewers are looking for"

Debating

Why do you think that is your strongest subject?

Drama – "it gives you a chance to step into other people's shoes…it's what I'm good at and what
I enjoy and I'm passionate about it. It started in Primary [school] as a hobby I enjoyed…I was
quite shy in school…[drama provided an] outlet to express my emotions and communicate with
all my form through, I could contribute any ideas"

Still about drama "[I was] told by parents and friends, 'you're such a performer'…I got into an
agency they said 'finally someone who can act'"

Agents and teachers "they just really encouraged me and told me I am good"

"Leading a team is connected to drama, it's confidence, creativity…understanding culture again
comes from drama, being a Christian helps with this"

"Debating comes from my English Teacher, I liked creative writing – I put a debate on facebook
and the feedback was encouraging" my "teacher is very encouraging and gives great advice and
feedback"

Following instructions "when we have supply teachers I just get on with it"

Would you say that your education helped you to identify your natural strengths?

"Definitely in primary school, we had a drama club…we had five or more shows I would really look forward to it"

"we did a lot of creative writing, I just kept writing and writing and writing…I was so engrossed in it being in another world"

"I didn't think I was different we would do these shows together…did a lot of spontaneous songs and drama"

Are there some skills and abilities you have noticed as an adult that were not noticed at school?

"Communicating skills and being non-judgemental and forgiving someone, I think it's a talent and to see the good in people"

How did your education help you identify your strengths? Can you write a letter to someone who has helped you identify and nurture a skill?

In less formal education environments was there anyone who helped you to identify your gifts and talents? Who and how.

"Being in Guides… organisation, patient, team building, following instructions and helping others, you do all the tents, wash up, you have to work in groups and build friendships…Soul Survivor [youth camp] helped me see positivity in everything. Team building and supporting other people, being honest"

What ways could people help you identify your skills and talents?

"Encourage me to try new things, step out of my comfort zone"

Letter

To name and name – Drama leaders

I just wanted to say a big thank you. From my first session at Marple Drama, I knew I was involved in something special and everything since then has been an incredible turning point for me! Not only have you encouraged me to share and nurture my talent but you have also developed me as a person. You are both such inspirational characters and all that you do for other people is nothing short of spectacular. So many opportunities have been created by you and I now feel that it is a possibility for me to take my passion into a career.

Appendix C – Interview with A Young German Woman

Questions for interview

Describe your education experience in 3 minutes

What was a typical day like for you in education?

What was your strongest subject?

Why do you think that was your strongest subject?

She made a distinction between the grade assessments and her own personal assessment

German "felt a passion for german" "had a good teacher he always motivated the whole class and taught us new ways of thinking instead of conservative teaching methods"

Biology "really interested in...things you are passionate about you are generally good at."

Passion – always thought it was a duty to go to school...[but in german] I was really looking forward to it and didn't see it as a duty

Would you say that your education helped you to identify your natural strengths?

"started on my own [identifying gifts] I was often on my own"

"Really motivates you when a teacher says you are really good at something" the teacher also asked other students to ask (name) for help

Are there some skills and abilities you have noticed as an adult that were not noticed at school?

"the system is just not designed for some subject groups"

How did your education help you identify your strengths?

"Yes, it isn't just the factual knowledge, lots of organisational skills and handling emotions"

In less formal education environments was there anyone who helped you to identify your gifts and talents? Who and how.

"new environment helped me find a new skill"

"additional RE...prepare services...I wouldn't have tried it without additional RE"

What ways could people have helped you identify your skills and talents when you were younger?

"Let people experience a lot...not forcing people into something...let them try new things...always believe in people and tell them that...you should support them...even if you don't like what they're doing"

"I would delete all the subjects I didn't enjoy...I think education should make sense and sometimes it doesn't"

Avoid "learning and forgetting"

"I learned something from these subjects...if you could learn more from these things where you can learn something...better to have lots of subjects where you can learn something"

Notes on body language

Other notes – prepared by the participant

Questions for interview

1.) **Describe your education experience in 3 minutes**
   - ➔ I went six years to a really small private catholic primary school
   - ➔ It was quite easy for me, had always good grades & a lot of free time, because I never made any homework

- ➔ Can't say if I enjoyed school/ primary education, but I know, that I didn't like the system of school at this time, because I always preferred being (home) alone
- ➔ My parents started to send me to many of free time activities, because I was bored of school and I never really wanted to meet with schoolmates outside of school
- ➔ I had lots of different music-, sport- and art- lessons as well as additional religious education, but I never really enjoyed one of the things I did
- ➔ After six years of primary school I started to go to a private catholic Gymnasium
- ➔ I didn't have issues with the education system of school - my grades were always fairly good, I wasn't lazy and I was able to interact with the increasingly pressure to perform – but I started to think, that I'm always disappointing my parents (I tried to "fight" against the undesired free time activities, but at the same time I felt really bad about it. I also noticed that my parents never believed in me and my skills, – despite the proof of ability to handle the academic pressure – and this was one of many reasons, why I began to show my desperation by vanishing myself (anorexia/ different topic, but one of the reasons why I finally found things I enjoy, and if you're looking at that is it an important step in my education)
- ➔ But I also tried to keep my strong outward impression at this time- although I was mental ill, I stuck to my grades in school, because I always had the hope that nobody else would notice, that I lost myself
- ➔ Education and showing my success in the form of grades was the only thing I haven't lost
- ➔ I hated my whole life, I was desperate and my only hope was the knowledge that I was able to show me and particularly my parents and friends that I could transfer the strength I always showed and proofed in school to hang on and conquer my desperation
- ➔ After my parents noticed that I was in a really bad mood, they released my from all my additional free time activities and I finally started to feel a bit better again
- ➔ Actually I really managed to conquer my illness trough lots of different factors: New friends, a new experiment back to god and a therapy were - among other things - the reason why I found new vitality also away from school
- ➔ Over the last two years of my academic education I also found things I really enjoy, because I noticed how valuable life really is
- ➔ I decided to convey all that stuff that helped me in my bad time to other people in need, and this is the reason why I finally had the idea to study medicine/ psychology
- ➔ Because the German system is based on a quite immovable system, I knew early that I would need a really good final exam to find a place in my desired subject to study

→ Nevertheless I also thought about out-of-school things, began to play drama, discovered photography, learned to appreciate true friendship, and met good

→ Of course I also studied quite hard, because I had a big goal to reach, but I found pleasure in things I did

→ Certainly, I also felt the pressure that the school system brought with, but – as I mentioned before – it was never really hard for me to handle with all these tasks, because I can count myself lucky, that my talents are obviously getting along with an quite inflexible education system

→ I finally made my graduation in summer 2015 and at the same time I reached my goal- I'm probably able to study psychology and this makes me feel good!

2.) What was a typical day like for you in education

Schedule 1: (Primary school)

Time	Weekdays
7.10 am	Get up
7.55 am-13.40 pm	School
14.00 pm	Back at home
After 14.00 pm	Free time activities
19 pm	Go to bed

Schedule 2: (Gymnasium)

Time	Weekdays
6.00 am	Get up
6.50 am	School bus
8.15 am – 14.30/16.00 pm	School
14.40 pm or 16.30 pm	School bus or train
16.10 pm or 17.30 pm	Back at home
After 16.10/ 17.30 pm	Homework/ free time activities
22.00 – 22. 30 pm	Go to bed

Schedule 3: (Exam preparation)

Time	Weekdays
11 am	Get up

Until 13 pm	Breakfast/ TV/ procrastination
13-20 pm	Studying/ procrastination
19-21 pm	Dinner/ sport/ TV
21 – 24 pm	Studying/ procrastination
1.30 am	Go to bed
	(approximated study time per day: 8 hours)

3.) What was your strongest subject?

➔ Related to grades on my leaving certificate:

- German, Religion, Geography, History, Biology, Chemistry, Physics

➔ Related to the own assessment

- Especially German but also Biology

4.) Why do you think it was your strongest subject?

➔ Because it was the best subject to "show" my skills

➔ I really enjoy keeping myself busy with thinking about complex text structures, analysing literature and writing dissertations

➔ I always work in a quite structured way, think about the pros and cons, and make clauses- this are just the "skills" you need to write analysis or discussions – stick to facts, "play" with words & have stamina with writing – this is something I improved over the last years and –unexpectedly- really enjoyed

➔ I also liked our teacher, he always motivated the whole class and taught us new ways of thinking instead of conservative teaching methods

➔ Finally I received even more motivation because my teacher and my schoolmates were impressed about my way to think and write – I never could really retrace the difficulty of academically writing, but - of course – it's always nice to know that you're able to do and enjoy something, that makes other people struggle

➔ The last fact I can think about is that our teacher also gave us alternatives to the classic way of writing and thinking – we were sometimes allowed to analyse in a more creative way (e.g. analysing classics in the form of a drama piece)

5.) Would you say that your education helped you to identify your natural strengths?

➔ Yes, definitely – many people wouldn't admit, that education identifies their skills, but it isn't only the factual knowledge that you get from school, it's especially the knowledge how to handle special situations/ stress/ pressure, to learn about yourself, to go beyond yourself, and to find your natural skills (e.g. communication, work in a team, organization etc.)

➔ It maybe doesn't fit for everybody, but my academic education helped me to find out, that I'm e.g. not bad at organizing

➔ These skills are often not obviously claimed in school, but they stick together with the classic subjects and – for me – they are more important to learn and discover than just the plain factual knowledge

6.) Are there some skills and abilities you have noticed as an adult that were not noticed at school?

➔ I wouldn't say that some skills just came out when I became an adult, but they're definitely strengths nobody noticed in school because the system just isn't designed for lot's of subjects and category groups (e.g. cooking, photography, drama …)

➔ But I'm also sure that everybody can discover new aspects/ skills and abilities at every point of his life, even when he left school, but I can't give you an personal example, because I just left school a half year ago

➔ If you look at passion as an synonym for skills & abilities (many people found passion in things they're really good at) you'll find lots of adults who found their passion or their skills at a quite late point of their life and for sure not in school

7.) How did your education help you identify your strengths?

➔ School always demanded (fordern) personal responsibility from oneself

➔ Lots of pupils were supported through their parents, especially when their younger

➔ I always received support in terms of money

➔ I could buy all the things I thought I need for a good education, but I often couldn't receive support in form of personal support through my parents, because they were busy with my younger brother

➔ This is the reason why I early learned to be self-dependent, organized & structured, because these are things which "guided" me to my good grades and my attempt to catch my parents attention

➔ But I couldn't say if I had learned these things without the school or education, because I probably wouldn't have had the ambition of good grades and in connection with that no reason the be self-dependent, organized & structured

➔ I'm even not sure of you count these facts as strengths, but for me they are often really helpful

➔ Another point is – of course – also the fact, that you'll find your strengths in certain subjects

➔ My achievements were always quite good in every subject, but never really good and this is probably the reason why I never saw some strengths until I discovered my passion for German

➔ If somebody is able to enthuse you for something, it's quite likely that you'll find a strengths in what you do & - fortunately – I could experience it

8.) **In less formal education environments was there anyone who helped you to identify your gifts and talents?**

➔ Yes, I think everyone you meet influences you and your gifts and talents, because he always assigns you new tasks and helps you to find your gifts and talents

➔ I can give you a couple of examples: (Before I start: Education can be everything for me: Family, friends, just a new environment – so I hope you didn't mean just a special education)

- My mum taught me cooking and baking, something I really enjoy
- I noticed through my religious education that I enjoy to prepare services – I had never tried it without my teacher, so I wouldn't have noticed it
- My father brought me rejoice in photography – it's his passion and he tried to pass it to me; first I hated it, but then I was fascinated
- I made a youth group leader training and learned trough that to like it and to find new skills
- And last but not least my psychologist helped me to uncover some of my gifts and talents, because I felt for a particular time, that I'm not blessed with any gifts at all

9.) **What ways could people have helped you identify your skills and talents when you were younger?**

➔ Let me/ people experience as much as possible

➔ Do not force people in keep doing something they don't like – you can't really have a skill/ strength you are not enjoying

➔ But "force" them to try new things – maybe you don't like these things for the first moment, but you'll enjoy them later

➔ Believe in people and in what they're doing

➔ Support people in what they're doing – even if you don't like the way they do it, try not to be a worrier and encourage people, otherwise they won't have the chance to develop themselves and their talents

Appendix D – Interview with a Second Young German Woman

Questions for interview   Name:

Describe your education experience in 3 minutes

"7 when I went to school, parents decided that I go to school that late"

"school said I should got to the gymnasium"

"I like to go out and make things with my hands"

There is a stigma against the Realschule.

Decided gymnasium but didn't have music and art often

Chose science and tech over languages, "hated to learn languages"

What was a typical day like for you in education?

What was your strongest subject?

Music, art, sciences

"very good marks at music and art"

"[music] teacher was really funny, [music] was always fun…" she said her teacher said, "you are really good"

"cello teacher always said to me [I had a] good sense to hear right and wrong notes" real focus on encouragement from teachers

Why do you think that was your strongest subject?

I "liked the practical side of science" we "always had two teacher in science at once"

Would you say that your education helped you to identify your natural strengths?

"my art teacher…gave me the opportunity to get this stipend at the art museum"

"after school clubs…school newspaper. Learned I am really interested in journalism"

She did work experience at a kindergarten

"you and Sophia should go to the school newspaper" – teacher's encouragement

Focus on opportunities

Are there some skills and abilities you have noticed as an adult that were not noticed at school?

Always like to make things and try new things

Her best friend "when we played together…we had a big box of old clothes…we always used them…we have learnt by ourselves, we are creative in this way"

She always appreciated adults "giving you opportunities"

Dad showed me I have mechanical skills

How did your education help you identify your strengths?

In less formal education environments was there anyone who helped you to identify your gifts and talents? Who and how.

"started to dance…this was a really good time, my dad is really good at dancing as well…I really love dancing"

What ways could people have helped you identify your skills and talents when you were younger?

"when I like something I [am] able to concentrate on it…I love it when I am able to achieve something when I notice I am good at something I start to like it" and the other way around.

"In the first few years of secondary school…there was a time when I thought I didn't have any talents…I had never found a subject that I was one of the best…I thought I am not intelligent…this was the time when I thought why should I live…I am always the average…It would have been good if people showed me talents before"

Notes on body language

Other notes

Appendix E – Interview with A School Head Teacher

Questions for interview

In your view, how do children learn best?

"I think that different students have different learning styles…it's about knowing your students"

[The work needs to be] "Differentiated to their level"

"children learn best when teaching is stimulating" "teachers are wildly exciting, causing children to learn, look for a hook or a starter"

"capture imagination" "get their interest"

"be very clear about the outcomes"

What is a typical day like for your children in education?

"You should encourage kids to work together"

Would you say that your education helps children to identify their natural strengths and

abilities?

"Students come to us with a learning style"

How does your education help your students identify their strengths?

"they demonstrate to us their competence"

"main vehicle is teachers reflecting on their learning…teachers annotate their lesson plans"

"you are seeing who is really good at acting…encouraging students to develop"

Are there some skills and abilities that you think are not realised in your school for any reason?

"If you don't offer in the curriculum, how will you know if the pupils are able to [excel in subjects]"

"We can only offer so much" "You are able to evaluate the kids' performance in relation to what's offered"

What is the role of play and creativity in your education?

In your opinion what ways can people help children identify and nurture their natural talents and abilities?

Other

Self-learning – "we want the students to be independent learners"

"kids don't get bullied"

"things are being deposited in you [through education]"

"They're being told every day that God loves them and has a plan for their life, he likes them and wants them to be successful."

The tagline and ethos of school – "bringing the love of God into the classroom"

"we are not church, we are school"

"you shouldn't have to put different hats on"

Appendix F – Interview with an Adult who was Home Schooled

Questions for interview

Describe your education experience in 3 minutes

Learning on own not working things out in conversation, home schooling avoided bullying. Parents believed that home schooling would allow him to focus in on main subject areas. Christian element were an important factor. Would meet up with other children but not for education.

Used books a lot, "everything became an English comprehension exercise". It was strange to go from working in a group to seminar based work in college so had to adapt.

At uni studied English with film – lectures and seminars were more his learning style

In his new degree the use of video lectures, essays, distance learning were his favourite way of learning

Who taught you and how? Did you stay at home? Did you go on long trips

What was a typical day like for you?

What was your strongest subject?

English, a lot of his strongest subjects came through a process of elimination because a lot of subjects he didn't have the appropriate equipment for like in Science. It was all textbook and theory. But he did always read a lot as a child.

Why do you think that was your strongest subject?

Would you say that your education helped you to identify your natural strengths or are these things you have noticed as an adult?

"Probably say no…probably eliminated a lot of subjects…some subjects have to be learnt with other students" but home schooling did strengthen stuff he was already good at.

As an adult able to reflect on the fact that home schooling helped him sit and concentrate on a piece of work for a long time. That skill had always been there but the method of home schooling enhanced the skill.

- *Ability to work things out off the cuff and work in groups he learnt as an adult*
- *Languages – but not sure if this is something he is gifted at as he has never seen anyone else trying to learn languages*

How did your education help you identify your strengths?

In less formal education environments was there anyone who helped you to identify your gifts and talents? Who and how.

Sports – Cricket – tactical – "very like chess" – doing that helped him to "nurture logical thought, leadership skills, and social skills"

He said that his thought processes are quite abstract and suspects that at primary school he was probably very abstract but sport and studying the rules/grammar of English helped him create a framework for creativity.

In cricket there are no set rules for fielding but there are positions, you have foundations you can play with. Structured Creativity. Abstract and rule bounded.

Chess

Poetry

Notes on body language

Other notes

He likes big ideas – "not just spoon fed but provided with a myriad of directions" given a lot of stuff left open ended – likes things where a lot of study has been done already but still needs to be debated and discussed. I 'probably prefer arts subjects…rather than questions with finite answers.' This was probably identified during first degree. You can take things in hundreds of directions. Partly inspired by a lecturer at uni first time round who "never really told you much…never gave his opinions, [he] asked a lot of questions" he explained how he saw this method was adopted by Jesus in his ministry.

What might have helped you develop and nurture more skills and abilities? Going to school with other people. He missed big projects and people telling him he was wrong. "Having other people can help reign you in!"

He said he would not consider home schooling for his own children!

Appendix G – A Results Table showing what Motivates Young People to work hard

Motivation	Percentage of Respondents
Getting a reward at some point in the future (e.g. high grades in school or a high paid job in the future)	20.83
A sense of personal achievement	25
Gaining recognition (other people seeing what you do well and noticing your abilities)	4.17
Earning money	4.17
Being really interested in what you are doing	16.67
Making the right, good decisions (ethical reasons)	0
Really believing in what you are doing (e.g believing that what you are doing can change people's lives)	8.33
If you have opportunities to play and explore	4.17
Curiosity	0
Trust in your leaders (youth leaders, teachers, parents, guardians)	0
You just love to soak all the learning up that you can get so work hard	0
A sense that working hard will bring about a good result, most learning will be beneficial	8.33
Progression in life (i.e. from school-college-university or progression from a less competitive sports' team to a more competitive sports team)	8.33

Appendix H – Access to Online Survey Results (Excluding 12 responses for Pilot Study)

Results from the questionnaires can be found at this website

https://www.surveymonkey.com/analyze/sZA_2FNs_2FqE5RPba3X7ckZCI8lWHJ4byY_2FoHkUz_2FlRNug_3D

username: craig.silcock

password: craigmcym

Appendix I – Plan for Focus Group Sessions

Research Project Overview

Focus Group -

GOALS

1. To find out how young people have experienced support in developing their gifts and abilities
2. To identify yp who feel marginalised by education
3. To identify whether certain intelligences have been promoted over others

METHODS

QUICK IDEAS

1. Flash cards with lists of gifts and abilities on - They can pick more than one up - take the gifts and put them in order of strength - then in order of how you think they are valued.

2. How well do you think schools and out of school clubs help you identify and develop your natural skills? Rating out of ten on a sheet of paper and why?

3. Using art, poetry, prose, song lyrics - Describe a time you were particularly productive or creative and were proud of what you produced. What happened? What did you achieve? How did it make you feel? when did you feel in your element where you were both enjoying what you were doing and doing well at that activity too?

4. Get the yp to write a letter or a poem to a teacher or other leader explaining how that person has helped them achieve their potential

5. Are there any skills you have that do not match up to the equivalent subjects in school? For example you might have a real talent for music but never done well in music at school. Or you might be a natural poet but struggled with English. You might find that you pick up languages quicker than other people when on holiday but struggle to learn in a language lesson at school. Discuss with the person next to you. On one side of a piece of paper write what you believe you are good at on the other side write why you were unable to excel and develop in that skill.

6. role play and talking in small groups using our imaginations to think of the best and worst scenarios for helping young people succeed.

7. What would help you notice and develop your talents more?

Things to collect

Pieces of paper

Pens, Sliced Skills Sheets

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STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS

Full Ethical Review Form

- Full ethical review must be used for research involving above minimal risk and therefore necessitating a more thorough ethical review prior to approval.
- Further guidance on projects which involve above minimal risk is provided within the University's Ethical Review Policy.
- Relevant professional body ethical guidelines should be consulted when completing this form.
- Please seek guidance from the Chair of your Faculty Research Ethics Committee if you are uncertain about any ethical issues arising from this application.
- There is an obligation on the researcher and supervisor (if applicable) to bring to the attention of the Faculty Ethics Committee any issues with ethical implications not identified by this form.

PART A: TO BE COMPLETED BY RESEARCHER

Name of Researcher: Craig Silcock

Student/Course Details (If Applicable)

Student ID Number: S024788E

Name of Supervisor(s)/Module Tutor: Nigel Roberts

	Award Title:	BA (H) SCHOOL, YOUTH, COMMUNITY WORK & PRAC THEOLOGY
Undergraduate Project/Assignment: x	Module Title:	Dissertation
	Project Title: How to identify and nurture natural talents and abilities in young people aged 11-19	

Expected Start Date: 10/01/16   Expected End Date: 30/03/16

Application Checklist

Have the following documents been supplied alongside this application?	Yes	N/A
Participant information sheet(s) in language appropriate to the recipient	X	
Participant consent form(s) in language appropriate to the recipient	X	
Letter/s of invitation to participants in language appropriate to the recipient	X	
Questionnaires (only attach questionnaires that have NOT been validated previously)	X	
Health related projects only: Letters giving permission for access to participants or confirming that full LREC ethical approval is not required		X
Other relevant information (e.g. tests or product information)		X

Submission Guidance (for completion by Faculty):

1. Project Outline

Please provide a brief paragraph indicating answers to the following questions where relevant:

   i) The aims and objectives of the project.
  ii) Its rationale and justification.
 iii) The research question or specific hypotheses to be tested.
 iv) The background to the project.
  v) Where the research is to be carried out.
 vi) Names of other individuals or organisations involved in the project.
vii) Whether other approvals have been gained or are to be sought.

The aim of this project is to find appropriate and effective strategies to enable youth and schools workers to identify and nurture passions and aptitudes in all young people. In some recent research and through the assessments of a variety of current academic commentators I have considered that some aptitudes and passions are valued higher than others which can lead to reduced self-confidence, reduced self-esteem and can limit opportunities for young people to reach their full potential. This is my first hypothesis, that some subjects and skills are valued more than others. My second hypothesis is that if you create a positive learning culture for people of all abilities, their learning will thrive, I believe that using varied teaching techniques can enable young people to learn best.

The reason this work is of interest to me is because I am a schools and youth work student with a passion for helping young people thrive. I will be carrying out my research in a number of ways in a number of contexts. I will conduct a questionnaire at the local high school (Marple Hall School) where I currently

spend some of my time working. I have already begun some initial conversations with staff about conducting the research but still need to gain approval from senior staff as well as gaining parental consent before the students take part.

I will also be interviewing a number of people from a variety of educational backgrounds; these meetings will be conducted one-to-one. The interviews will be held in a place where at least one other adult is around, in a safe, comfortable environment. Four of the five interviewees will be aged 19+ and one of the interviews will be aged 11-18. This interview will be conducted in the young person's home with their parent present.

I will be conducting some focus groups from a variety of youth groups in nearby areas, the youth leaders will be present during these focus groups, the young people will be pre-warned of the group and have opportunity to opt in to the research project.

The groups I will be visiting are from neighbouring church youth groups, Elle Bird at St Chad's Church in Romiley, Ruth Bull from St Mark's Church in Bredbury and Dan Cook from Glo Church in Offerton. The groups will be held in the regular meeting places for the young people I will be working with, a venue where I will be the visitor and they are the hosts.

2. Research Procedure

Please provide a summary of the procedures that will be followed when carrying out the research project under the following headings.

a) The design of the project (including, where appropriate, issues of statistical power):

I will be drawing from some of the theories I have studied through background reading to develop some relevant research questions. If my hypotheses are correct there will be a correlation between subjects/skill strengths and how much they feel valued dependent on that strength.

b) The procedures to be followed:

I must provide the participants with sufficient information about the research and the research process before asking for consent from them and their parents, they will have opportunity to opt out at any time during the research process.

There must be no leading questions and reactions should be professional and not casual.

Young people should be supported pastorally post-research especially if they are upset by the research topic and discussion.

During focus groups there will be one adult taking note of verbal contributions. There will be one other adult assessing non-verbal response whilst the researcher facilitates the group.

There is room for some discursive discussion but there should be an intentional movement through the questions to ensure that the data is valid and reliable.

c) The participation of subjects in the project:

The subjects will have the opportunity to respond in a variety of ways that benefit people of all personality types, the research methods will be adapted to benefit the participants as much as possible to help them feel safe and remove any undue pressure.

d) How the design of the project and the procedures followed are likely to assess the research question or test the hypothesis in question or establish some significant result:

Using the research project will help me establish ways in which a variety of people learn and develop their aptitudes best. Making connections between young people, their abilities and the ways they like to learn as well as the things that motivate them should help me to identify ways in which young people learn best.

Gaining information about how valued by adults young people feel for their achievements and aptitudes should help me to identify ways to enable schools and youth workers to purposefully acknowledge and honour the skills of young people.

e) Availability of facilities/resources/equipment to enable the project to be carried out:

Focus groups can be conducted in the premises that are regularly used for youth work activities, resources and equipment needed for the research are minimal and will be provided by the researcher.

f) Procedures that will be followed if any adverse event occurs:

If there are any issues that arise or discomfort during any of the research, the researcher will ask the participants if they would like to continue, postpone or abort the research. If there is any challenging behaviour, positive discipline must be enforced by the appropriate youth leaders to ensure the environment is kept safe. In the focus groups, there will be at least one youth worker available who has a strong relationship with the young people through regular contact. These youth workers will be available to pastor and provide support in the event of a young person becoming upset by the discussion and content. Although great effort should be made to ensure the meetings are as comfortable, supportive and encouraging as is formally possible.

With the interview with the young person, if they appear upset or troubled by the content of the discussion there will be follow up discussion and support with the parent and the young person to ensure the young person is and feels valued, supported and cared for.

3. Participant Recruitment & Characteristics

Please provide clear information regarding the recruitment of participating subjects and their appropriateness to the project:

(*NB: Student researchers must also ascertain from their Supervisor whether or not they require a criminal record check through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) in order to enable this project to proceed. If this is the case the application must make clear whether or not it has been undertaken. Any data collection or other activities requiring this clearance must not begin until it has been obtained.*)

a) The number of subjects involved in the study (including the adequacy of the sample size for both qualitative and quantitative research):

   Qualitative Research
   3 focus groups with 6-10 participants.
   5 interviews
   Quantitative Research
   100 questionnaires

b) How participants will be identified, approached or recruited:
   Participants will be identified from a variety of areas with varying demographics. From youth groups the young people will be identified by the youth leaders. I will ask the leaders to identify young people with varied abilities and skills as they will know their young people and what they are like.

c) Whether there are any inclusion or exclusion criteria, together with their justification:
   There is an exclusion criteria as we need a variety of young people for the benefit of the research therefore we will need to exclude some young people to enable a diverse sample of young people.

d) The age range of subjects; the gender balance of subjects; and the subjects' state of health:
   The age range of youth subjects will be ages 11-19
   The interviewees will predominantly be aged 18+ with some 11-19 years olds as well.
   There will be a mixture of age and gender across all of the research methods.

e) Whether there is any inducement to participate in the study:
   Snacks and food will be provided for the participants when they take part in the research. There is not monetary inducement.

f) How participants will be informed about the right to withdraw from participation the study (and whether time limits will be established during which a participant can request for their data to be withdrawn from the study):
   In the information sheet I will provide the details about the right to withdraw from the research. They will have 10 days after the research project is conducted to withdraw their data.

g) Whether the project involves any special groups requiring some additional justification or permission (e.g. children and young people under 18 years of age, those with a learning disability or cognitive impairment, patients, people in custody, people engaged in illegal activities (e.g. drug taking), or individuals in a dependent or unequal relationship):
   The project will involve young people aged 11-18.

h) Will informed consent be obtained from research participants?   Yes

   Please give details of who will obtain content and how this will be undertaken.

Consent will be obtained by me as the researcher by providing potential participants with an invitation, an in depth information sheet and consent form.

4. Information and Data

Please provide answers to the following questions regarding the handling and storage of information and data:

a) How will research data be stored (manually or electronically)
   Data will be stored on a computer electronically.

b) How is protection given to the subject (e.g. by being made anonymous through coding and with a subject identifier code being kept separately and securely)?
   The information will be saved on a computer that will be locked with a password only known by me, the researcher. The participants will not be named; anonymity will be kept at all times.

c) What assurance will be given to the subject about the confidentiality of this data and the security of its storage?
   The participant will be informed that their information will be stored confidentially on a locked computer that nobody can access other than the researcher.

d) Is assurance given to the subject that they cannot be identified from any publication or dissemination of the results of the project?
   The participants will be assured that the information displayed will appear as anonymous and it will not be possible to identify them from the research.

e) Who will have access to this data, and for what purposes?
   The researcher will have access to the data for the purposes of the specific dissertation only.

f) How will the data be stored, for how long, and how will it be discarded?
   Data will be stored on a locked computer for a total of 12 months before being discarded by deletion.

5. Risk, Harm and Other Ethical Considerations

Please provide an estimate of the perceived benefits or outcomes of the project weighed against the possible harms caused to the participating subject.

Please identify any potential risks or hazards that might be caused to subjects or the researcher, in addition to any discomfort, distress or inconvenience to them, together with any ethical problems or considerations that the researcher considers to be important or difficult in the proposed project.

Please explain how any potential risks or hazards will be dealt with, along with any justificatory statements. This information should highlight any remaining ethical considerations and to respond to

them in a way which may assist the Research Ethics Committee in arriving at some judgement upon the proposal.

There is a possibility that some of the participants may feel distressed by the subject matter of the research since some of the discussion relates to some issues that are personal and could cause some participants to feel like they have not succeeded or that their potential has not been realised which could cause a feeling of disappointment. It might be that the discussion makes some participants feel like they are undervalued or not good at things that are valued highly. This will be something I will need to work with the youth workers on, to identify those young people that appear to be upset by the topic and help them to overcome those upsets using pastoral support and encouragement. Whilst this may be a negative effect of doing the research, the positive side of this is that, using the research we might be able to help younger people in similar positions realise their potential and encourage self-confidence.

6.   Supporting Information

Please attach the consent form, information sheet, and questionnaire/interview questions to this application.

Further guidance on the design and content of consent forms and information sheets can be found on the University's Research Ethics website.

Please turn page

INVITATION TO A RESEARCH PROJECT

YOU ARE INVITED TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH PROJECT AIMED AT YOUNG PEOPLE TO HELP YOUTH WORKERS FIND WAYS TO IDENTIFY AND DEVELOP

NATURAL GIFTS AND ABILITIES IN YOUNG PEOPLE! PLEASE CONSIDER JOINING US TO HELP US GATHER YOUR THOUGHTS, EXPERIENCES AND UNDERSTANDING TO FUEL OUR RESEARCH!

IT WOULD BE GREAT TO SEE YOU THERE! PLEASE CONTACT CRAIG SILCOCK IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO COME ALONG! CRAIG.SILCOCK.YOUTH@GMAIL.COM

Information Page for Research Methods

<u>This is an information page that explains the purpose of the study and what the focus group will involve</u>

Finding ways to identify personal strengths and gifts in young people research project

You are invited to take part in a research project that is designed to identify ways to help young people thrive during their teenage years. Please take the time to read through the following information and consider whether you would like to take part in the project.

The purpose of this study is to research how young people experience in school and out of school activities, to understand whether they feel supported in finding out and nurturing their gifts, talents and abilities regardless of personality, background or education.

You have been invited to take part in the project because you are either a young person aged between 11 and 19 and are therefore directly impacted by schools and youth work in your area or you are aged 20+ and have been invited to take part because of your specific experiences of education that might be contrasting to the local dominant culture. This provides you with a clear, experiential understanding of how well you think schools and youth activities are doing and how they can improve. In the focus group there will be approximately 8 participants in this project and they will be between the ages of 11 and 19. If you are being interviewed you will meet one to one with the researcher in a safe and comfortable environment. If you are taking part in the questionnaire this will be completed online.

It is your choice as to whether you take part in the research. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to complete a consent form and this will also need to be signed by a parent or guardian if you are aged 11-18. If you decide to take part you have the opportunity to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

To gather the research in the focus group a small group of young people will gather to answer a variety of questions in a number of creative ways including writing on post it notes, role play and talking in small groups using our imaginations to think of the best and worst scenarios for helping young people succeed. The session will be very informal and relaxed with refreshments available. The session will last approximately 40 minutes. Once the session has finished, the information will be gathered up and used to consider how schools and youth centres are failing and how they might improve. We will also consider which young people are given more or less support to nurture creative skills and gifts. With the information we would seek to enable all young people to identify and develop their own passions, gifts and abilities creatively.

The online questionnaire consists of a variety of question types including tick boxes, mutiple choice questions and text boxes. It will take between 5 and 10 minutes to complete.

The interviews will last approximately 30 minutes and will involve a few discussion techniques including opportunities to draw, write and speak to respond to a variety of questions. Some of the questions will require one word responses, other questions will require longer responses.

All of the information in this study will be kept strictly confidential, all of your details will be kept safe and anonymity will be kept. The findings of the research must be kept securely for a period of 12 months before they are deleted.

If you would like to opt into the project you can contact Craig Silcock on the details above at anytime and mention that you would like to take part in the study.

I am conducting this research as a student of Staffordshire University. The results will become an integral part of my university dissertation as I complete a degree in Schools, Youth and Community Work with Practical Theology. If you would like to access my dissertation this will be available for you to see by contacting me personally once it has been completed.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information. I very much look forward to hearing from you soon.

Craig Silcock
craig.silcock.youth@gmail.com
07586 313 679

30/12/15

Consent Form For Participants

<div align="center">Consent Form Spring 2016</div>

Title of Research Project – Finding ways to identify personal strengths and gifts in young people research project

Details of Researcher

Craig Silcock (Schools, Youth and Community Worker)

133 Stockport Rd

Marple

Stockport

Cheshire

SK66AF

Email: craig.silcock.youth@gmail.com

Phone: 07586313679

Section 1 – To be completed by the participant

I confirm that I have read the details on the attached information sheet for this study.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time before or during the project.

I confirm that I would like to take part in the project.

Name of child:

Signature:	Date:
Participant	

Please tick the boxes below if you would like to give consent:

I agree to the focus group/interview being recorded on an audio recorder ☐

I agree to the focus group/interview being recorded on a video recorder ☐

I agree for the use of anonymised quotes to appear in publications ☐

Section 2 for participants aged 11-18 – to be read and signed **only** by a parent or other adult with parental responsibility.

I have read the details and agree to give permission for my son/daughter to take part in the study proposed.

I give permission for Craig Silcock to process the personal data given on this form for use in relation to my child taking part in this study.

Information from parent/guardian	
Name:	Relationship to child:

Signature: **Date:**
Parent or other adult with parental responsibility
To be completed by the researcher:
Signature: **Date:**

Questionnaire Questions

1. WHAT IS YOUR AGE?

○ 11-12

○ 13-14

○ 15-16

○ 17-18

○ 19

2. WHAT IS YOUR GENDER?

○ Female

○ Male

*3. WHAT IS (OR WAS) YOUR STRONGEST SUBJECT AT SCHOOL IN YOUR OPINION?

▼

Design and Technology
Dance
Science
Art
Maths
Drama
Geography
Music
Travel and Tourism
Sport
Computing
Drama
History
English
Religious Education/Theology/Philosophy
A foreign language
Business Studies
Other (please specify)

4. WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS YOUR STRONGEST SUBJECT?

○ I just know how to get/do things right in it

○ I do not feel like I can do any other subjects well

○ It is fun

○ I have a really inspiring teacher

○ I have a really encouraging teacher

○ I like achieving something

○ I feel pressured to do well in that subject

○ Other (please specify)

[   ]

5. HOW VALUED DO YOU FEEL YOUR TALENTS, SKILLS AND ABILITIES ARE?

○ Not valued at all

○ Valued a little

○ Valued as much as most people

○ Valued more than most people

○ Significantly valued

*6. DESCRIBE A TIME SOMEBODY HAS HELPED YOU NOTICE OR DEVELOP A TALENT OR SKILL

[   ]

7. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES HELP YOU GET THINGS DONE?

☐ Small group work

☐ Doing something active like dancing or sport

☐ Role play

☐ Quietness

☐ Music being played

☐ Working alone

☐ Planning projects (charity events, performances, sport events or similar)

☐ One to One work with an adult

☐ Other (please specify)

[   ]

8. HOW COULD PEOPLE HELP YOU DEVELOP AND IMPROVE SOME OF THE SKILLS AND GIFTS THAT YOU HAVE?

[   ]

9. What is your biggest motivation for working hard?

○ Getting a reward at some point in the future (e.g. high grades in school or a high paid job in the future)

○ A sense of personal achievement

○ Gaining recognition (other people seeing what you do well and noticing your abilities)

○ Earning money

○ Being really interested in what you are doing

○ Making the right, good decisions (ethical reasons)

○ Really believing in what you are doing (e.g believing that what you are doing can change people's lives)

○ If you have opportunities to play and explore

○ Curiosity

○ Trust in your leaders (youth leaders, teachers, parents, guardians)

○ You just love to soak all the learning up that you can get so work hard

○ A sense that working hard will bring about a good result, most learning will be beneficial

○ Progression in life (i.e. from school-college-university or progression from a less competitive sports' team to a more co team)

Please turn page.

10.

Please rank this list in order of how valued you feel these skills are valued by adults

- Cooking
- Science
- IT/Skills on a computer
- Dance
- Music
- Following Instructions
- Cleaning
- Debating
- Understanding Cultural Differences
- Team Work
- Design
- Map Reading
- Drama
- Maths

Researcher Declaration

I undertake to carry out the project described above in accordance with ethical principles. I have completed the application in good faith. I accept that providing false information constitutes scientific fraud and will be subject to appropriate disciplinary procedures.

Signature of Researcher ℰ ~ Date: 20/1/16

NB: Any departure from the protocol for this research project may mean that the ethical approval decision made by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee is no longer valid and a new ethics proposal will have to be submitted. It is the responsibility of a student researcher to discuss proposed changes to the agreed protocol with their project supervisor as soon as possible so that a revised /new ethics application can be submitted. Research based on any revised / new protocol **MUST** not proceed unless and until the protocol has ethical approval.

STUDENT RESEACHER: NEXT STEP

COMPLETE AND SAVE THIS FORM IN THE FOLLOWING FORMAT FOR THE FILE NAME
- FAMILY NAME FIRST NAME, STUDENT, DISCLAIMER E.G. WHIZZ BILLY STUDENT DISCLAIMER

- E-MAIL IT AS A WORD ATTACHMENT, ALONG WITH ANY RELEVANT SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS, USING THE FILE NAME AS THE SUBJECT [IN THE SUBJECT BAR OF THE E-MAIL] TO YOUR SUPERVISOR.

THERE IS NO NEED TO PRINT THIS FORM

STAFF RESEACHER: NEXT STEP

PLEASE FORWARD THIS FORM TO FACULTY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE [ethics-FACT@staffs.ac.uk] WHO WILL ARRANGE FOR IT TO BE CONSIDERED BY AN INDEPENDENT MEMBER OF THE FACULTY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

THERE IS NO NEED TO PRINT THIS FORM

PART B: TO BE COMPLETED BY SUPERVISOR/MODULE TUTOR (If Applicable)

I have examined this proposal and confirm that the rationale and methodology is appropriate and that it can proceed to the stage of ethical consideration.

I have checked and approved the key documents required for this proposal (e.g. consent form, information sheet, questionnaire and interview schedule).

Signature of Supervisor: Date:

SUPERVISOR: NEXT STEP

READ AND CHECK WHEN RECEIVED FROM THE STUDENT; IF SATISFIED ADD YOUR NAME AND DATE WHERE INDICATED
- SAVE AND SEND AS A WORD ATTACHMENT BY E-MAIL, USING THE FILE NAME AS THE SUBJECT [IN THE SUBJECT BAR OF THE E-MAIL] TO ethics-FACT@staffs.ac.uk

PART C: TO BE COMPLETED BY CHAIR OF FACULTY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

This research proposal has been considered by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee and **RECEIVED** ethical approval.

This research proposal has been considered by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee and was REFUSED ethical approval on grounds detailed below: