

Institution: BRUNEL UNIVERSITY (H0113)
Unit of Assessment: 25 – Education
Title of case study: The Urban Scholars Programme – a research-based educational intervention
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The Urban Scholars Programme (USP) entails an innovative and sustained intervention study, which was launched by Professor Valsa Koshy in response to requests from local authorities (LAs) to address the ‘wastage of talent’ among inner-city teenagers and to support schools with the implementation of the UK’s Widening Participation Policy (2000), aimed at encouraging students from poorer backgrounds to study at university. The impact of the USP research has been evident at different levels. The direct beneficiaries are the students (aged 12 to 16 years) attending the programme, their families and teachers from 33 London schools in areas of high social deprivation. Through dissemination activities and the significant interest from educationalists, government policy makers, Local Authorities, Widening Participation (WP) officers in universities and academics, the project’s research outcomes have had significant impact, both nationally and internationally. Through a range of additional knowledge transfer activities, the programme model and a toolkit of support materials continue to be made available to universities and schools.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>In their attempts to promote WP, the practical strategy adopted by most schools has been to select their brightest students (referred to as ‘gifted and talented’) to receive short interventions at universities, with the assumption that this would address the issue of unequal access in youngsters’ orientation to HE. The USP was set up as a research-based intervention study to gain greater understanding of the structures which shape the education of these youngsters. To achieve this aim, the USP was set up in 2000 and has continued as a 4-year research-based intervention programme. The key research team was Professor Koshy (Lead Researcher, throughout), Ronald Casey and Carole Portman Smith, two Research Assistants and 2 university WP officers. Potential users—LA advisers and teachers—worked alongside the research team. The research took place in two cycles of 4 years (2002-2010). The research team took the view that the complex structures that limit the youngsters’ orientation to HE were not well understood. Instead of providing short interventions to widen access, the USP was set up as a longitudinal research programme to deepen our understanding of the malleability of structural forces that shape youngsters’ educational orientations and to learn lessons about the design and transportability of intervention studies in the field.</p> <p>To take account of emerging data and reflecting on the findings from the first cycle of the programme, the team adopted an innovative Design Experiment (DE; also known as Design Research) methodology. The programme was set up as a research-site following guidance from a DfEE working group to which Koshy was an invited member (led by Professors Charles Desforges and Stephen Gorard) promoting DE as a useful approach for interventions. This methodology afforded the opportunity to use a control group and continually monitor the effectiveness of the different components of the intervention through immediate feedback from all the research participants – students, their parents and teachers. These were used to refine the programme components and to generate new hypotheses and practices, which could be used in other similar settings. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analysed. The data were derived from questionnaires and interviews with students and their parents, focal (not focus) group discussions with students providing immediate feedback, pupil trajectories, test results and interviews with a sample of users (Local Authority co-ordinators and head teachers). The strength of the DE methodology supported the research team to test the theories in the context of practice by working collegially with practitioners and constructing practical knowledge that is relevant to a range of practitioners (Koshy et al., 2011, cited as Source 5, in Section 5).</p> <p>The Urban Scholars programme model used a multi-faceted intervention approach formed of components that included subject-specific sessions in three core curriculum areas, as well as critical thinking, parental support, guest speakers and working with undergraduate mentors. The students for the intervention programme were selected by schools on the basis of their social deprivation (using their entitlement to free school meals as an indicator) and potential for high achievement, assessed through a series of tasks that involved problem-solving and analytical skills</p>

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and using qualitative information rather than single dimensional test results. The tasks were developed collaboratively by the teachers and the research team. 81% of the parents of the children had no university education.

Following the work undertaken for the USP research, Koshy has led several research projects relating to talent development across subject disciplines and age groups, many of which were commissioned by the UK government, LAs and charities. Her activities included seeking (through national surveys and interviews with samples of schools) practitioners' perceptions and practices relating to the implementation of the government's 'gifted and talented' policy that required schools to select a specific percentage of students as 'gifted and talented'. The findings of the two national surveys and interviews as well as working closely with teachers resulted in distinct outcomes. These included highlighting the need for a re-conceptualisation of the concept of 'giftedness' and 'talent' as domain-specific attributes and the need for nurturing children's special aptitudes and interests rather than a global labelling of children as 'gifted and talented' (Output 2 in Section 3). Koshy's research on aspects of talent development generated opportunities to work with international experts in Talent Development and, in collaboration with them, to organise 13 national conferences for practitioners during 2008-2013 at Brunel University.

.3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- Koshy, V; Brown, J; Jones, D. & Portman Smith, C. (2013) Exploring views of parents of high ability children living in relative poverty. *Educational Research*. DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2013.825167>
- Koshy, V. & Pinheiro -Torres, C. (2012) Are we being de-gifted Miss?' Primary School Gifted and Talented Co-ordinators' responses to the Gifted and Talented Education Policy in England. *British Educational Research Journal*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/berj.3021>
- Casey, R; Portman Smith, C. & Koshy, V. (2011) Opportunities and Challenges of Working with Gifted and Talented Students in an Urban Context: A University-Based Intervention Program. *The Gifted Child Today*, 34(1), 35-43. [Article available on request from Brunel]
- Koshy, V; Casey, R; Pinheiro - Torres, C. and Portman Smith, C. (2008) *Surfacing Bubbles of Submerged Talent: Features of an Urban Scholars programme and Case studies of 20 Gifted and Talented Teenagers*. Report of a study commissioned by London Challenge, Department for Children, Schools and Families. [Report available on request from Brunel]
- Koshy, V; Casey, R, and Taylor, A. (2008) The Urban Gifted student and Higher Education. *Gifted Education International*, 23(3), 5-19. [Article available on request from Brunel]
- Casey, R, & Koshy, V. (2002) *Submerged Talent and World Class Recognition in Assessing Gifted and Talented Children*. London: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. (This book was an outcome of presentations by researchers from 7 countries at the QCA international seminar. [Book available on request from Brunel]

Research and Development grants (Total = £1, 491,000) have been obtained in the period 2000–2012. Competitive research bids included funds from the DfES (£360,000) and the Moody's Foundation in New York and London (£570,000); the remainder were awarded by charities.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

In addition to the continuous dissemination of research findings during 2004-2008, the research team undertook a range of targeted Knowledge Transfer activities from 2008-2013. Newsletters, teaching resources and user-guides, drawing on the extensive learning from the USP, were distributed (Source 7). The Knowledge Transfer national conference in November 2012 was attended by representatives from universities ($n = 63$) in the UK and schools ($n = 43$). The Rt Hon Dr. Vince Cable, the Business Secretary, gave a keynote speech on the government's social mobility agenda. A toolkit for users that includes the USP outline, research findings, resources, lesson plans and evaluation tools was given to all attendees (Source 7). Follow-up support was requested by 57 universities in England, Scotland and Wales. A total of 123 additional toolkits have been requested from schools across the UK to support WP activities, either for use of the programme model or specific components of the intervention.

Insights from the research developed a number of strands that resulted in impacts on the aspirations and achievement of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds:

- Teachers felt uneasy about following the government policy requirement of selecting and

labelling 5 to 10% of the brightest children (who in most cases formed the intervention groups at university programmes) as globally 'gifted and talented', which was seen as a 'flawed' concept and unworkable, especially in schools where levels of achievement were low. The need for non-traditional assessment guidance to identify 'submerged talent' was raised (Koshy & Pinheiro -Torres, 2012). This resulted in designing tools for non-traditional assessment of potential ability and providing selection criteria to the 33 participating schools and through the KT activities to a further 123 schools during 2005-2013.

- Contrary to the general perception that parents from poorer families need their aspirations raised, it was found that parents of the USP students already had high aspirations for their children. They needed greater knowledge of pathways to achieve their aspirations and greater support from schools. They perceived both their children's peer groups and the neighbourhoods as threats to their children's wellbeing and advancement and sustained interventions were seen to be a necessary step to address these. This insight had the impact of addressing and involving parents in a novel way and has also led to providing schools with guidelines for conducting parents' workshops and the publication of a book funded by HSBC entitled '*Nurture – Parents, it is in your hands*' for wider use. The booklet is freely disseminated through KT activities, Brunel national conferences and given to all participating schools and parents, distributing 1830 copies so far.
- The second cycle of the 4-year programme (2006-2010) was attended by 100 students from 30 London schools across 9 LAs and 83% completed the full programme. 40.6% received A or A* for their Mathematics and 43% received A or A* for English Language (higher than school predictions). The second cycle of the programme also showed that the students' attendance at the USP had a direct impact in terms of improving their academic performance and HE orientation compared to that of a control group (Koshy et al., 2011. (cited as Source 5 in Section 5).
- Short 'widening access' interventions may not be sufficient to change deep-rooted feelings in youngsters that 'universities are not for us'. The drop-out rate of participating students in the first 6 weeks of the programme was 16%, whereas the remainder of the students remained on the programme (only four dropped out due to moving out of the area) had at least 86% attendance over the 4 years (Koshy et al., 2011).
- Students (93%) reported a higher level of self-confidence, determination and critical thinking skills as a result of their attendance at the programme. Students' confidence is a critical factor for academic achievement. The evidence of the USP's success in raising students' self-confidence was reported as one of the reasons for its adoption by schools.

As well as raising the attitudes, aspirations and engagement in learning of the pupils who attended the programme, we have evidence of impact of our research on:

- Parents were guided in their relationships towards building young people's aspirations and enhanced life chances. These were achieved through parents' workshops and sharing the resources we used with all participating schools. We explored the theme 'what parents of children who live in relative poverty need and want' and the results were published. (Output 1, Section 3). (Source 6)
- Teachers from the 33 participating schools and others through their attendance at our four additional national conferences (100+ each time) which specifically addressed aspects of the Urban Scholars Programme, have benefited through professional development. We have supported teachers and their practices regarding the national agenda for equity, inclusion and closing the gap between students from affluent and less well-off families. (Source 6)
- School managers and LA officers, who were involved in the management of programmes in pursuit of WP and social mobility, through Koshy and the programme team providing consultancy and guidance to schools and LAs setting up their own local support interventions. (Source 7).
- Koshy was invited by Professor Les Ebdon (Director of the Office for Fair Access) in July 2013 to discuss the USP as a model for interventions and its transportability.
- In addition to both quantitative and qualitative evidence gathered during the programme presented at a Brunel national conference (Source 2), there was some evidence from pupils from an area of high social deprivation who made presentations on the variety of

ways they have been able to deal with drug crimes and gun culture as a result of the resilience and critical thinking skills they developed through their participation in the USP. This high-profile conference was attended by Mrs Sarah Brown (the then Prime Minister's wife) and the then UK School's Minister Lord Adonis. (Source 2)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. The USP research has received much public media attention and follow-up requests for advice and direction. (a) New tests 'spot inner-city talent' BBC News. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/1338034.stm> Quote: 'researchers at...Brunel University have found that a selection of children from a deprived area of London did better in problem solving than their peers from 'a leafy suburb'. Dr Koshy believes bright pupils from deprived areas should not be selected and labelled by how they perform in traditional tests. 'We need a way of identifying these pupils which does not rely only on closed tests'. (b) <http://www%20timeshighereducation.co.uk/147078>. Published article on the launch of the USP.
2. National Conference BBC news <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/7625968.stm>. Quote: 'What difference can studying make to children living in deprived areas? How did one 13 year old expelled from school for carrying a knife go on to achieve six GCSEs? Schools Minister Lord Adonis and Sarah Brown, wife of Prime Minister Gordon Brown, visited a scheme in which a university is helping to raise ...'
3. *Surfacing Bubbles of Submerged Talent*. Report from the Centre for British Teachers (<http://www.cfbt.com/en-GB/Research/Research-library/2011/r-surfacing-bubbles-of-submerged-talent-2011>). The Centre for British Teachers is an international provider of education services with a readership and users over 2 million.
4. The Urban Scholars Programme model was circulated to all secondary schools in England <http://content.yudu.com/A1rt97/SecEd14Apr11/resources/15.htm>
5. A statement received from Senior Adviser, DfES National Strategies: 'The Brunel Urban Scholars research programme continues to have a significant impact on a range of stakeholders. It has directly influenced the lives of over 900 teenagers. The parental support element of the programme continues to be used by participating schools and by many more after the Brunel national dissemination days. As an LA adviser previously, I'm aware that teachers and middle leaders have been using elements of the programme model and/or the different components of the research programme. As Senior Adviser for the DfES National Strategies, we drew on aspects of the programme principles. In one of my current roles (Content Director for Challenge the Gap) we continue to benefit from your ground-breaking work. The USP not only directly benefits participants, but also impacts on thousands of school students and teachers across the country.'
6. A statement received from Professor Charles Desforges OBE, previously Director of the ESRC's Teaching and Learning research Programme: 'I have known about the Urban Scholars Programme, over the past several years, in my work with the government's DR methodology group and through many research and users forums. This research driven programme is of enormous significance to issues of social equity in particular as these relate to access to higher education by youngsters brought up in areas of relative deprivation and poverty. The programme has had impressive impacts on students, families, schools, HE institutions and on a wider research and development community. For the students, evaluations have shown enhanced aspirations, school success and HE destinations. For participating families, their life-chances have been enhanced. Many HE institutions have attended briefing conferences aimed at promoting equity of access. The programme leaders have also invested time and effort in promoting and developing methodology in research and development work in particular with respect to design research. I would rate the significance of this work as very profound and its reach is of international quality.'
7. USP Newsletters and toolkit at <http://www.brunel.ac.uk/sse/education/research/bace>.