

A series of realist evaluations of multi-component  
programmes with disengaged young people: What works, for  
whom, and in what contexts?

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## Abstract

1           Periods spent in the absence of education, employment, or training (NEET)  
2 are associated with adverse psychological wellbeing, poverty, social marginalisation,  
3 criminal behaviour, and premature mortality. As such, implementing effective  
4 programmes to re-engage young people who are classified, or are at risk of becoming  
5 classified, as NEET is of great importance to these individuals, family, and society  
6 more broadly. To this end, the aim of the current thesis was to conduct three realist  
7 evaluations to understand how, and under which circumstances multi-component  
8 programmes may impact the engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes of  
9 disengaged students and young people who are not in education, employment, or  
10 training.

11           Study 1 consisted of a realist evaluation of a six-month multi-component  
12 programme for year ten (aged 14-15 years) disengaged students across three schools.  
13 In Study 2, the findings and refined programme theories from Study 1 were  
14 subsequently tested through a 10-week multi-component programme with  
15 disengaged year eight (aged 12-13 years) students and evaluated over ten months.  
16 Informed by the findings from the first two studies, the final study comprised the  
17 development, implementation, and evaluation of a four-week multi-component  
18 programme utilising appreciative inquiry as a theoretical framework to re-engage  
19 young people (aged 17-23 years) who were outside of education, employment, and  
20 training.

21           Overall, the findings from the three studies highlighted the potential benefits  
22 of utilising a multi-component programme to re-engage young people. Specifically,  
23 context-mechanism-outcome configurations and refined programme theories relating  
24 to the development of trust, positions of authority, the power of collective  
25 experience, exploration of possible life directions, active learning, deviant peer  
26 contagion, and the reinforcement and enactment of hegemonic masculine identities  
27 were developed. Collectively, the results provide a detailed and practical  
28 understanding of the architecture of programmes that can benefit disengaged young  
29 people and help advance the implementation of future programmes for working with  
30 disengaged populations.

## Declarations and Statements

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### DECLARATION

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34

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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Date 18/03/2021

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### STATEMENT 1

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This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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### STATEMENT 2

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I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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## Conference Presentations

- 65 Owen, E. C., Knight, C. J., & Hill, D. M. (2020, May). “I’ve done stuff that I didn’t  
66 know I was even capable of doing”: A realist evaluation of a multi-  
67 component programme for disengaged students. Oral Presentation via Zoom,  
68 ASTEM Online Postgraduate Conference. Swansea
- 69 Owen, E. C., Knight, C. J., & Hill, D. M. (2019, September). A realist evaluation of  
70 a multi-component programme with disengaged young people. Oral  
71 Presentation at Aberystwyth University, Building an ACE Aware Nation in  
72 Wales – Understanding the Contribution of Welsh Research. Aberystwyth
- 73 Owen, E. C., Knight, C. J., & Hill, D. M. (2019, September). “Naughty kids come  
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75 of love” A realist evaluation of a multi-component programme for  
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- 78 Owen, E. C., Knight, C. J., & Hill, D. M. (2019, June). A realist evaluation of the  
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- 86 Owen, E. C., Knight C. J., & Hill, D. M. (2019, March). A realist evaluation of a  
87 sport-based multi-component programme for disengaged young people. Oral  
88 Presentation at Open University – 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Sport and Fitness Conference –  
89 My Child: The Athlete (Youth Development in Sport), Milton Keynes
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91 TACKLE: A programme for students at risk of school dropout. Oral  
92 presentation at University of Dalarna, Swedish Behavioural and Social  
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- 94 Owen, E. C., Knight, C. J., & Hill, D. M. (2018, May). Evaluation of TACKLE:  
95 A school-based education and sport programme utilising a professional rugby  
96 club to target the classroom behaviour and engagement of students at risk of

- 97 school dropout. Poster presentation at Bangor University, Pan Wales  
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## Chapter 1: Introduction

403 Young people between the ages of 16 and 24 years who have not participated  
404 in any form of education, employment, or training for a minimum six-month period  
405 are classified as belonging to the category of “Not in Education, Employment, or  
406 Training” (NEET) (Welsh Government, 2018). Data from 2019 shows that  
407 approximately 11,000 (11%) of Welsh 16-18-year-olds and 37,000 (16%) of 19-24-  
408 year-olds were classified as NEET (Statistics for Wales, 2020). These statistics are  
409 concerning, for when young people have an absence of education, employment, or  
410 training provision it can result in adverse psychosocial outcomes, social  
411 marginalisation, criminal behaviour, and premature mortality (D’Angelo & Kaye,  
412 2018; Nudzor, 2010; Psacharopoulos, 2007). There are also a range of social and  
413 economic impacts including higher public health and criminal justice expenditure  
414 (Goldman-Mellor et al., 2016; Levin & Belfield, 2007; Maguire, 2015). Given such  
415 consequences, the need to re-engage young people who are NEET<sup>1</sup>, as well as  
416 preventing young people becoming NEET, is considered a key government priority  
417 and a major public health concern (Kirlic et al., 2020; Public Health England, 2014).

418 Disengaged young people are characterised by low levels of educational  
419 engagement, behavioural-related issues, and psychosocial challenges (Gutierrez-  
420 Garcia et al., 2018). Educational engagement issues include: negative feelings  
421 towards learning and lacking a sense of belonging and identification  
422 (emotional/affective engagement); limited involvement and poor conduct during  
423 academic and social activities (behavioural engagement); and negative beliefs or  
424 attitudes towards education alongside low psychological investment in their own  
425 development (cognitive engagement) (Hart et al., 2011; Singh & Srivastava, 2014).  
426 In addition to disengagement, behavioural-related issues include: persistent  
427 disruption; disobedience; verbal aggression and physical violence; unpredictability;  
428 poor attendance or unexcused absences; a high number of behaviour referrals or  
429 exclusions; substance use; and criminal behaviours (Fortin et al., 2010). Finally,  
430 psychosocial challenges include: low levels of self-esteem, self-worth, and social  
431 competence; high levels of emotional distress; and poor overall life satisfaction  
432 (Goldman-Mellor et al., 2016; Gutierrez-Garcia et al., 2017, 2018; Quiroga et al.,  
433 2013). Despite the lengthy list of negative characteristics, it is important to note that

---

<sup>1</sup> Young people who are classified, or are at risk of becoming classified, as NEET will hereafter be described collectively as disengaged.

434 all are considered modifiable, and thus can be developed and enhanced through  
435 programmes, and with appropriate support structures (Hart et al., 2011; Stea et al.,  
436 2019).

437           Consequently, over the last few decades, a number of different programmes  
438 have been implemented with disengaged young people, which aim to enhance  
439 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes (Mawn et al., 2017; Prevatt &  
440 Kelly, 2003). Such programmes have included, one-to-one mentoring (e.g., Converse  
441 & Lignugaris, 2009), positive youth development programmes (e.g., Curran &  
442 Wexler, 2017), and sport/physical activity related programmes (e.g., Armour &  
443 Duncombe, 2012; Whitley et al., 2017). Unfortunately, however, current evidence  
444 regarding programme effectiveness is limited in quality and it remains unclear which  
445 programmes are most effective (Christenson et al., 2001; Mawn et al., 2017;  
446 Valdebenito et al., 2018). For instance, a systematic review (Prevatt & Kelly, 2003)  
447 and meta-analysis (Mawn et al., 2017) found inconsistencies in the overall impact of  
448 different programmes for disengaged young people on various outcomes, with each  
449 demonstrating strengths and limitations.

450           To compensate for the limitations of different programmes, it has been  
451 suggested that intensive, multi-component approaches may be the most promising for  
452 re-engaging young people (Foster & Jones, 2006; Mawn et al., 2017; Prevatt &  
453 Kelly, 2003). Particularly, a thoughtfully designed multi-component programme that  
454 combines one-to-one mentoring, positive youth development, and sport and physical  
455 activity programmes, may be useful (cf. Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019). Despite this  
456 recommendation, to my knowledge, no programme drawing on the full range of  
457 available modalities has been utilised or evaluated with disengaged young people.  
458 Consequently, the aim of this thesis was to conduct three evaluations to understand  
459 how, and under which circumstances multi-component programmes may impact the  
460 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes of disengaged students and  
461 young people who are not in education, employment, or training.

## 462 **1.1 Structure of the Thesis**

463           Following this introductory chapter, the thesis comprises six further chapters.  
464 Chapter 2 offers an extensive literature review that begins by defining and  
465 conceptualising 'NEET' and outlining the characteristics of disengaged young  
466 people. The review then summarises the overall effectiveness of current re-  
467 engagement programmes and investigates the characteristics of programmes that can

468 facilitate or constrain positive developmental outcomes. Chapter 3 then provides an  
469 overview of realist evaluation methodology, explaining why this approach was most  
470 appropriate to address the aim of this thesis. This chapter also discusses the key  
471 principles of scientific realism, the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of  
472 realist evaluation.

473         Chapters 4 to 6 present the empirical studies of this thesis. Specifically,  
474 Chapter 4 presents the findings of a realist evaluation of a six-month multi-  
475 component programme for year 10 (aged 14-15 years) disengaged students across  
476 three schools. The findings and refined programme theories from Study 1 were then  
477 tested in a new context of disengaged year eight (aged 12-13 years) students (Chapter  
478 5). This study consisted of a realist evaluation with a longitudinal follow-up to  
479 examine both the short and long-term effects of a 10-week multi-component  
480 programme. Informed by the findings from the first two studies, Chapter 6 details the  
481 development, implementation, and realist evaluation of a four-week multi-  
482 component programme utilising appreciative inquiry as a theoretical framework to  
483 re-engage young people (aged 17-23 years) who were outside of education,  
484 employment, and training.

485         Chapter 7 summarises the refined programme theories and findings from all  
486 three realist evaluations, unpacking how, why, for whom, and under which  
487 contextual circumstances multi-component programmes impacted on disengaged  
488 young peoples' developmental outcomes. The theoretical, methodological, and  
489 practical implications of these findings are discussed, including recommendations for  
490 programme development and innovation, and new insights regarding knowledge  
491 translation and dissemination strategies.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 492 **2.1 Defining and Conceptualising ‘NEET’**

493           The term ‘NEET’ refers to young people between the ages of 16 and 24, who  
494 are ‘not in education, employment, or training’ and who have been absent for a  
495 minimum six-month period (Welsh Government, 2018). Adopting the label of  
496 ‘NEET’ to broadly classify this population of young people has received criticism  
497 due to identifying young people by what they are not (i.e., not in education,  
498 employment, or training) (Nudzor, 2010; Yates & Payne, 2006). This label fails to  
499 encapsulate individual experiences and circumstances, the wider systemic, social,  
500 and cultural structures in which young people live, and disregards the young person’s  
501 strengths, skillset, and potentialities (Gutierrez-Garcia et al., 2017; Haudenhuyse et  
502 al., 2012).

503           Given such criticism, alternative terms are used (often interchangeably)  
504 within the literature such as, disengaged, disaffected, disconnected, dispossessed, at-  
505 risk, underserved, marginalised, impoverished, and socially vulnerable (Lubans et al.,  
506 2012; Sandford et al., 2006; Swadener, 1995). Unfortunately, there remains a lack of  
507 clarity concerning which term is the most appropriate (Ralston et al., 2016). For the  
508 purpose of this thesis, the term disengaged will be used because it is a nuanced and  
509 multidimensional concept that takes into account the complexities of young people’s  
510 lives (Hancock & Zubrick, 2015).

511           There is general consensus that disengaged young people subsume a  
512 heterogeneous mix of individuals who face many complex, fluctuating, and non-  
513 linear transitions, risk factors, and multiple forms of disadvantage (Avila & Rose,  
514 2019; Hayward & Williams, 2011). For instance, disengaged young people may be  
515 more susceptible to extreme poverty, social deprivation, a reliance upon school for  
516 meals, caregiving responsibilities for younger siblings, housing instability,  
517 psychological challenges, parental incarceration, poor social skills, low academic  
518 attainment, unsupportive teachers, and a disconnect between education and their  
519 needs (Nudzor, 2010; Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019). Such adversity may manifest  
520 itself in three main ways: engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial challenges  
521 (Gutierrez-Garcia et al., 2018).

### 522 **2.2 Engagement, Behavioural, and Psychosocial Challenges**

523           Educational engagement is usually determined by a young person’s interest,  
524 participation, investment, and active effort towards their learning within the

525 educational context (D'Angelo & Kaye, 2018). It is conceptualised as a  
526 multidimensional construct, constituting three key components: emotional,  
527 behavioural, and cognitive engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004). Emotional  
528 engagement refers to identifying with the educational institution, valuing and trusting  
529 key stakeholders (i.e., teachers, adult members, mentors, and peers), and  
530 experiencing feelings of passion and enthusiasm towards learning (Appleton,  
531 Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Singh & Srivastava, 2014). Behavioural engagement  
532 is determined by a young person's active participation in the classroom and  
533 meaningful extra-curricular activities, conformity to rules, and the absence of  
534 challenging and delinquent behaviour (Fredricks et al., 2004; Li & Lerner, 2013).  
535 Lastly, cognitive engagement comprises a young person's investment in their own  
536 academic development, reflected in their willingness to set goals, devise plans,  
537 monitor progress, problem solve, modify strategies, and actively seek challenges and  
538 new learning opportunities (Fredricks et al., 2004).

539         Each component of educational engagement is influenced by a complex and  
540 dynamic interaction between a young person's internal and external resources  
541 (Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019). Internal resources refer to individual factors and  
542 personal attributes, such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, and perceived competence  
543 (Jalala, Latifoglu, & Uzunboylu, 2020). External resources relate specifically to  
544 contextual factors and strengths, including the extent and quality of support provided  
545 by the school, peers, family, workplace, and community (Jalala et al., 2020;  
546 Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019). There is recognition amongst researchers that  
547 engagement does not reside within the individual, rather, it is a joint product of the  
548 developing young person and the wider environmental context (Furlong &  
549 Christenson, 2008; Li, 2011; Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019). Consequently, in order to  
550 promote engagement, efforts and strategies should be multidimensional, focusing on  
551 enhancing the internal and external resources available to young people (Furlong &  
552 Christenson, 2008; Lerner & Ohannessian, 2013; Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019). In  
553 turn, enhancing young people's engagement can lead to a host of positive  
554 developmental outcomes and trajectories (Furlong & Christenson, 2008).

555         Educational engagement has been considered an important predictor of  
556 positive youth development outcomes, including academic achievement, school  
557 completion, and future employment opportunities (Chase, Warren, & Lerner, 2015;  
558 Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Li & Lerner, 2011; Wang & Holcombe,

559 2010). Overall, high levels of engagement have been shown to positively influence a  
560 young person's behavioural conduct within the school environment and to reduce the  
561 likelihood of school dropout (Appleton et al., 2008; D'Angelo & Kaye, 2018;  
562 Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001). Importantly, unlike many other predictors of  
563 NEET status that are fixed (e.g., home background and ethnicity), educational  
564 engagement has been considered a more malleable characteristic and an essential  
565 mechanism to focus on when designing programmes to re-engage young people  
566 (Hart et al., 2011; Henderson et al., 2017; Jerald, 2006; Smart et al., 2017).

567         Alongside engagement, behaviour-related issues have been shown to be  
568 robust predictors of a young person dropping out of school and entering NEET status  
569 (Li, 2011; Obsuth et al., 2017; Rodwell et al., 2017; Smart et al., 2017). The most  
570 prevalent behavioural problems reported by educators are: 1) persistent disruption  
571 and disobedience; 2) absenteeism and truancy; 3) aggression and physical violence  
572 towards peers; 4) substance abuse; 5) unpredictability, and; 6) a lack of self-control  
573 with an inability to effectively manage emotions (Department for Education, 2017;  
574 Fortin, Lessard, & Marcotte, 2010). When such behaviour-related issues are repeated  
575 and sustained they can have a deleterious effect on a young person's academic  
576 attainment (Breslau, 2010; Larson, Chapman, Spetz, & Brindis, 2017; Smart et al.,  
577 2017) and present a unique risk factor for school withdrawal (Witte et al., 2013).  
578 Thus, effective programmes are warranted to minimise behavioural problems in  
579 order to help guide a young person's transition from secondary school into further  
580 study or employment (Gutierrez-Garcia, Benjet, Borges, Rios, & Medina-Mora,  
581 2017; Rodwell et al., 2017; Smart et al., 2017).

582         Engagement and behaviour-related issues may also be a predictor of  
583 psychosocial challenges (Lewis, Huebner, Malone, & Valois, 2011; Li & Lerner,  
584 2011; Wang & Peck, 2013). Extensive research has shown that young people who  
585 are disengaged and consistently demonstrate negative behaviours also possess higher  
586 levels of emotional distress, including anxiety and depressive symptoms, substance  
587 use, low self-esteem and self-worth, and low perceptions of competence (Benjet et  
588 al., 2012; Li, Bebiroglu, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2008; Li & Lerner, 2011;  
589 Shochet, Dadds, Ham, & Montague, 2006; Wang & Fredricks, 2014). Such adverse  
590 psychosocial outcomes and mental health conditions may also become more  
591 entrenched during the transition to early adulthood (Gutierrez-Garcia et al., 2018; Li  
592 & Lerner, 2011; Maddox & Prinz, 2003; Ramsdal et al., 2018). For instance, an



593 eight-year longitudinal study found that when young people experience NEET status  
594 during adolescence, they are more likely to develop mental health conditions as they  
595 transition to early adulthood, compared to young people who consistently remain in  
596 education, employment, or training (Gutierrez-Garcia et al., 2017).

597         Periods spent in the absence of education, employment, or training may be an  
598 antecedent for the development of mental health conditions and adverse psychosocial  
599 outcomes due to the limited social interaction and integration during this time,  
600 leaving young people lost, lonely, and without a sense of meaning, direction, or  
601 vision for their future (Benjet et al., 2012; Esch et al., 2014; Gutierrez-Garcia,  
602 Jimenez, Martinez, & Gonzalez, 2017; Gutierrez-Garcia et al., 2018; Hartas, 2011;  
603 Ramsdal et al., 2018). Over time, long periods outside of education or employment  
604 have been associated with cognitive impairments, reduced capacity for learning, and  
605 destructive coping behaviours (Gutierrez-Garcia et al., 2018). Without effective  
606 programmes and support systems, such young people may be unable to re-orient and  
607 re-integrate (Ramsdal et al., 2018).

608         Increased levels of disengagement, behavioural related issues, and  
609 psychosocial challenges are considered strong predictors for becoming NEET, as  
610 well as a consequence of NEET status (Benjet et al., 2012). Thus, there is a need to  
611 implement programmes that directly target engagement, behavioural, and  
612 psychosocial challenges seen in disengaged young people and subsequently, cultivate  
613 positive developmental outcomes. To ensure such programmes are effective requires  
614 a focus on supportive person-context relationships that are fundamental for positive  
615 adaptation during periods of transition (Li, 2011).

### 616 **2.3. The Role of External Resources on Engagement, Behavioural, and** 617 **Psychosocial Outcomes**

618         External resources relate specifically to a young person's contextual  
619 strengths, including family socio-economic status, structure, and the quality of social  
620 support provided by family members, peers, the school, and the wider community  
621 (Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019). The developmental opportunities and support  
622 structures provided in young people's family and educational environment are  
623 critical in the promotion of positive engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial  
624 outcomes (Li, 2011).

### 625 **2.3.1 Socioeconomic Status**

626 One important external resource and contextual strength to consider is an  
627 individual's socioeconomic status (Moustakim, 2015). Extensive evidence has shown  
628 that low socioeconomic status can have a significant negative impact upon a young  
629 person's engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes (Bakar et al., 2010;  
630 Benjet et al., 2012; Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2014; Bynner & Parsons, 2002;  
631 Kroenke, 2008; Kumar & Chahal, 2016; Li & Lerner, 2011). In particular, childhood  
632 poverty has been associated with disengagement from learning, low academic  
633 attainment, disruptive behaviour, low self-esteem, and limited employment prospects  
634 (Carter-Wall & Whitfield, 2012; Kroenke, 2008). A longitudinal study demonstrated  
635 a clear pathway between young people who are eligible for free school meals and the  
636 development of NEET status, between ages 16 and 19 (DfE, 2011). It has even been  
637 suggested that the reason young people become NEET is a result of their  
638 socioeconomic status and the subsequent circumstances of adversity and hardship  
639 which, without effective programmes and support, may shape and dictate their lives  
640 (Spielhofer et al., 2009). This has been referred to as the Matthew Effect whereby,  
641 differences between young people (i.e., socioeconomic status) at the start of  
642 education, exacerbate over time, until the initial advantage becomes a significant  
643 advantage, and a substantial gap between young people is evident (Lee, Wickrama,  
644 O'Neal, & Prado, 2018; Merton, 1968; Ralston et al., 2016).

645 **2.3.1.1 Socioeconomic status and School Experiences.** Many young people  
646 have reported experiencing discomfort and vulnerability in school, given the  
647 structure of the education system, in which the curriculum, culture, ethos, educators,  
648 and student population, are seen to be dominated by higher, rather than lower,  
649 socioeconomic status individuals (Archer, Halsall, Hollingworth, & Mendick, 2005;  
650 McPherson, 2020; Reay, 2006). Higher socioeconomic status families arguably carry  
651 more cultural (e.g., knowledge, language, and culture to guide decisions and  
652 behaviours), economic (e.g., monetary assets to afford tuition fees, tutoring, and  
653 academic textbooks), and social (e.g., networks and resourceful connections) forms  
654 of capital (Archer, 2003; Archer & Yamashita, 2003; Ball, 2003; Bourdieu, 1986;  
655 Jaeger & Mollegaard, 2017; Spaaij, 2012). Consequently, young people from  
656 families with lower socioeconomic status may enter the educational context already  
657 in a disadvantaged position compared to their higher socioeconomic status  
658 counterparts (Geckova, Tavel, Dijk, Abel, & Reijneveld, 2010; Higgins, 2013;

659 Werfhorst & Hofstede, 2007). A lack of resources and identification with the  
660 educational institution may result in young peoples' lower levels of emotional,  
661 behavioural, and cognitive engagement (Fredricks, Reschly, & Christenson, 2019).  
662 Such disengagement can in turn lead to poor behavioural conduct, which may  
663 exacerbate a young person's isolation from school, leading to a greater risk of  
664 adverse psychosocial outcomes, and eventually, school dropout (Fredricks et al.,  
665 2019).

666 **2.3.1.2 Socioeconomic Status, Sport, and Physical Activity.** Beyond the  
667 educational impact, the socioeconomic status of families may also influence young  
668 people's involvement and participation in sport or physical activity (Hanson & Chen,  
669 2007; Holt, Kingsley, Tink, & Scherer, 2011; Vella, Cliff, & Okely, 2014). Sport and  
670 physical activity participation may subsequently positively impact young peoples'  
671 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes (Bailey, Cope, & Parnell,  
672 2015; Castelli et al., 2014; Owen et al., 2016). For instance, substantial evidence has  
673 underscored the central role sport and physical activity play in the development of  
674 young peoples' physical (e.g., cardiovascular fitness and muscular strength),  
675 emotional (e.g., self-esteem and self-efficacy), individual (e.g., self-discipline and  
676 persistence), social (e.g., teamwork and collaboration), intellectual (e.g., engagement  
677 and learning), and financial (e.g., productivity and performance) forms of capital  
678 (Bailey et al., 2015).

679 Unfortunately, due to financial constraints, families with lower  
680 socioeconomic status may not have access to the necessary leisure facilities and  
681 equipment (Hardy et al., 2010; Hesketh, Waters, Green, Salmon, & Williams, 2005;  
682 Kirby, Levin, & Inchley, 2013). They may also lack the knowledge and  
683 understanding of the importance of incorporating sport or physical activity into  
684 everyday life, and consequently, may not promote or encourage these activities with  
685 their children (Mackintosh, Knowles, Ridgers, & Fairclough, 2011; Quarmby &  
686 Dagkas, 2013). Thus, efforts to promote sport and physical activity levels should be  
687 embedded within programmes targeting disengaged young people, in order to  
688 address socioeconomic status disparities and improve developmental outcomes  
689 (Castelli et al., 2014).

### 690 **2.3.2 The Role of Social Support**

691 Access to social support, particularly the extent to which young people feel  
692 connected to those around them, has been considered both a protective and a risk

693 factor for becoming NEET (Centre for Promise, 2014a; Ramsdal et al., 2018). Young  
694 people, and in particular young people from vulnerable backgrounds, seek  
695 relationships and connections with adults (e.g., teachers, mentors, coaches) and their  
696 peers (Lerner et al., 2013). The type of relationships and connections formed can  
697 either lead young people towards or away from education and employment (Centre  
698 for Promise, 2014a; 2014b).

699         The presence of positive social support and relationships has been linked to  
700 feelings of psychological security and safety, and can enhance disengaged young  
701 peoples' self-worth, self-esteem, and perceived competence (Lerner et al., 2013;  
702 McLafferty et al., 2018). Social support may also help young people cope more  
703 effectively with stress and adversity and has been shown to mitigate adverse  
704 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes (Cohen & Wills, 1985;  
705 Gottlieb, 2000; Ramsdal et al., 2018). As such, social support has been considered to  
706 serve as a protective factor against school dropout (Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019;  
707 Ramsdal et al., 2018). Given such findings, implementing programmes which  
708 surround disengaged young people with social support through the presence of  
709 warmth, caring, and meaningful, supportive relationships is pertinent (McLafferty et  
710 al., 2018).

#### 711 **2.4 Programmes to Promote Engagement, Behavioural, and Psychosocial** 712 **Outcomes**

713         One-to-one mentoring, positive youth development (e.g., classroom-based  
714 workshops and work-based placements), and sport and physical activity programmes  
715 have all been implemented in an attempt to enhance the adverse engagement,  
716 behavioural, and psychosocial characteristics of disengaged young people (Mawn et  
717 al., 2017). Substantial literature is available on each type of programme. Given the  
718 breadth of information to be covered, combined with the vast evidence base, the  
719 following sections draw mainly on meta-analysis and/or systematic reviews,  
720 supplemented by examples from individual studies where appropriate.

#### 721 **2.5 One-to-One Mentoring Programmes**

722         Although various definitions of mentoring exist, the approach is often  
723 characterised by the following elements: 1) the establishment of a continuous  
724 professional relationship between the mentor and mentee; 2) the mentor has a higher  
725 possession of wisdom, knowledge, and experience compared to the mentee; and 3)  
726 the mentee is able to benefit from the mentor's expertise either academically,

727 socially, or emotionally (Butler, 2016; Tolan et al., 2013). Overall, one-to-one  
728 mentoring programmes hold promise as a programme strategy for promoting positive  
729 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes (Raposa et al., 2019). For  
730 instance, mentoring has been associated with improved emotional wellbeing (Dolan  
731 et al., 2011), social skills (Karcher, 2008), academic achievement, and a reduction in  
732 delinquency (Tolan, Henry, Schoeny, Lovegrove, & Nichols, 2014).

733         Given such benefits, over the last two decades, there has been a proliferation  
734 of mentoring programmes developed for, and delivered to, young people displaying a  
735 range of engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial challenges (Kanchewa,  
736 Schwartz, & Rhodes, 2017). However, despite the widespread expansion of  
737 mentoring programmes and acceptance of their benefits, a series of meta-analyses  
738 assessing the effectiveness of mentoring with disengaged young people have  
739 revealed only modest effect sizes. Further, questions remain regarding the conditions  
740 in which mentoring will be most likely to succeed (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, &  
741 Cooper, 2002; DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011; Raposa et  
742 al., 2019).

743         The earliest of the meta-analyses examining mentoring programmes for  
744 disengaged young people was conducted by DuBois et al. (2002) and included  
745 findings from 55 evaluations of mentoring programmes conducted between 1970 and  
746 1998. The aims of the meta-analysis were to assess the overall effects of mentoring  
747 programmes on disengaged young people and to investigate the factors that may  
748 account for variation in programme effects (i.e., mentee characteristics, type of  
749 relationship formed, design and implementation of programme, and outcome  
750 domains). The review encompassed studies which defined mentoring as a one-on-one  
751 relationship between an older, more experienced mentor and a younger mentee.  
752 Overall, it was concluded that, on average, mentees experienced developments in  
753 five outcome domains: emotional/psychosocial wellbeing ( $d = 0.10$ , 95% CI = -0.02  
754 – 0.22), problem or high-risk behaviour ( $d = 0.21$ , 95% CI = 0.09 – 0.33), social  
755 competence ( $d = 0.15$ , 95% CI = 0.00 – 0.30), academic/educational ( $d = 0.11$ , 95%  
756 CI = 0.03 – 0.19), and career/employment ( $d = 0.22$ , 95% CI = 0.06 – 0.38).  
757 However, when collapsing effects across all outcome domains, mentees experienced  
758 only modest developments ( $d = 0.18$ ).

759         In 2011, DuBois and colleagues expanded on their earlier analysis and  
760 examined 73 independent evaluations of mentoring programmes published between

761 1999 and 2010. Building on their earlier review, DuBois et al. (2011) explored  
762 whether mentoring programmes had the potential to impact on multiple domains  
763 (e.g., academic, psychosocial, social, and conduct problems). A moderator analysis  
764 was also conducted to investigate the characteristics of programmes which may  
765 account for variations in overall effectiveness. To be included in the review,  
766 mentoring programmes had to consist of a relationship between a young person and a  
767 non-parental adult (or an older young person), with the overall goal of promoting  
768 positive developmental outcomes. Programmes utilising paid professionals (rather  
769 than volunteers) and older peers as mentors, along with those adopting a group  
770 mentoring format, were included. Consistent with the earlier review (DuBois et al.,  
771 2002), mentees across the studies included in the meta-analysis reported  
772 improvements in attitude/motivation ( $d = 0.19$ ), social/relational ( $d = 0.17$ ),  
773 psychosocial/emotional ( $d = 0.15$ ), conduct problems ( $d = 0.21$ ), academic/school ( $d$   
774  $= 0.21$ ), and physical health ( $d = 0.06$ ), with overall effect sizes around 0.20  
775 (DuBois et al., 2011).

776         The third and most recent meta-analysis of mentoring programmes for  
777 disengaged young people (Raposa et al., 2019), comprised 70 programmes published  
778 between 1975 and 2017. Unlike DuBois and colleagues' (2011) review, which  
779 included mentoring programmes adopting various formats and strategies (e.g., group  
780 mentoring), Raposa and colleagues' (2019) only included programmes utilising a  
781 one-on-one relationship between a younger mentee and an older, non-parental  
782 mentor (excluding programmes adopting a peer, group, or curriculum-based  
783 approach). The review estimated the overall effect of mentoring programmes and  
784 examined whether the size of programme effects was moderated by key mentor and  
785 mentee characteristics, programme characteristics, and research design issues.  
786 Findings indicated improvements in five broad categories, including school  
787 functioning ( $g = 0.20$ ,  $t = 6.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ), social relationships ( $g = 0.19$ ,  $t = 5.82$ ,  $p =$   
788  $< .001$ ), health ( $g = 0.23$ ,  $t = 4.76$ ,  $p = < .001$ ), cognition ( $g = 0.19$ ,  $t = 4.81$ ,  $p = <$   
789  $.001$ ), and psychosocial symptoms ( $g = 0.17$ ,  $t = 5.01$ ,  $p = < .001$ ). The average effect  
790 size across all 70 studies and all outcomes was  $g = 0.21$  ( $p < .001$ ; 95% CI = 0.14 –  
791 0.28).

792         Drawing together the findings from these meta-analyses, it appears that  
793 mentoring programmes produce modest effects for disengaged young people.  
794 However, it is apparent that the characteristics of the mentee (e.g., gender, gender

795 and goals of the mentorship, age, risk factor status), mentor (e.g., age, gender, mentor  
796 background), and programme (e.g., setting, duration, specific outcome domains) may  
797 moderate the overall effectiveness of mentoring.

### 798 **2.5.1 Mentee Characteristics**

799 Several mentee characteristics have been proposed to influence the effects of  
800 mentoring (Raposa et al., 2019). Specifically, their gender, the association between  
801 gender and goals of the relationship, the age of the mentees, and certain individual  
802 and environmental risk factors.

803 **2.5.1.1 Gender.** The earliest review (DuBois et al., 2002) reported no  
804 significant difference regarding the gender of the mentee on the impact of the  
805 outcomes of mentoring. However, more recent evidence reports larger average effect  
806 sizes for mentoring programmes with a higher proportion of male mentees.  
807 Specifically, DuBois and colleagues' (2011) found a greater effect for programmes  
808 with 50% or more male mentees ( $d = 0.24$  versus  $d = 0.18$ ). Similarly, Raposa and  
809 colleagues' review (2019) identified that, in comparison to females, larger effects  
810 were found in samples that had a higher percentage of males ( $B = 0.38, p < .05$ ).  
811 Gender could influence the impact of mentoring as girls and boys may require  
812 different types of mentoring relationships (e.g., psychosocial versus instrumental;  
813 Bogat & Liang, 2005). Research has shown that girls may enter mentoring  
814 relationships with complex relational histories and more internalising of problems,  
815 including anxiety and depression, in comparison to boys, and may therefore  
816 encounter more challenges forming and maintaining an effective relationship with  
817 their mentors (Bogat & Liang, 2005; Hankin et al., 1998; Kessler et al., 2005; Lerner  
818 & Ohannessian, 2013; Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes, Lowe, Litchfield, & Walsh-Samp,  
819 2008).

820 **2.5.1.1.1 Goals of the Mentoring Relationship.** Gender may determine the  
821 overall goals of the mentoring programme and the type of relationship formed  
822 (Rhodes, 2002). For instance, girls may be referred to a mentoring programme due to  
823 insecure attachments and relationships with their mothers (Bogat & Liang, 2005;  
824 Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes et al., 2008). Comparatively, the school or community may  
825 refer boys to a male mentor due to behavioural problems and the absence of a male  
826 role model within their home environment (Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes et al., 2008). As  
827 such, research suggests that girls may respond more favourably to psychosocial  
828 mentoring, which relies predominantly on the development of an interpersonal

829 relationship between the mentor and mentee. This relationship may consist of the  
830 mentor providing emotional support, and helping the mentee develop personal  
831 characteristics such as self-esteem, authenticity, trust, and communication skills  
832 (Allen & Eby, 2004; Liang, Tracy, Talor, & Williams, 2002). Mentoring for boys,  
833 however, may predominantly consist of instrumental mentoring, whereby the mentor  
834 helps the mentee problem solve and reach specific goals (Allen & Eby, 2004). Thus,  
835 male mentees may not require or respond well to the provision of emotional support  
836 but may respond favourably to more autonomy-supportive behaviours (Bogat &  
837 Liang, 2005). However, overall, effects of mentoring across all three meta-analyses  
838 have remained consistent, regardless of the goals of the mentoring programmes  
839 reviewed (DuBois et al., 2002; 2011; Raposa et al., 2019).

840 **2.5.1.2 Age of Mentees/Developmental Stage.** Mentee age has been  
841 perceived as an important factor influencing the quality of the mentoring relationship  
842 (DuBois et al., 2011). Though, across all three reviews (DuBois et al., 2002; 2011;  
843 Raposa et al., 2019), no differences in effect size were apparent as a function of  
844 mentee age. This is a somewhat surprising finding because previous research has  
845 suggested mentorships may be more successful for younger adolescents, and that  
846 relationships with older adolescents may be less close and enduring (e.g.,  
847 Kupersmidt, Stump, Stelter, & Rhodes, 2017). However, it may be that mentoring  
848 has the potential to be effective across each stage of adolescence, but the mentor has  
849 to tailor their style of mentoring in order to be sensitive to their mentees context and  
850 specific cognitive and social competencies (DuBois et al., 2011). Sensitive mentors  
851 may help both younger and older adolescents to develop a sense of self-worth, in  
852 that, the mentee is able to see themselves as someone who is worthy of love and  
853 friendship, and able to see their mentor as someone they can rely upon during  
854 challenges and times of need (Rhodes, 2002).

855 **2.5.1.3 Individual and Environmental Risk Factors.** Mentoring  
856 programmes may be particularly effective for young people experiencing a range of  
857 individual and environmental risk factors (DuBois et al., 2011). Risk factors related  
858 to the individual include low academic achievement, behavioural problems, and  
859 psychosocial challenges. Environmental risk factors comprise low socioeconomic  
860 status, complex family backgrounds, and conflict with peers (Weiler, Boat, &  
861 Haddock, 2019). Accordingly, young people with high levels of individual and/or



862 environmental risk factors have been the focus of a considerable proportion of  
863 mentoring programmes (DuBois et al., 2002).

864 DuBois et al. (2002) found larger effect sizes for mentoring programmes  
865 which served young people experiencing both individual and environmental risk  
866 factors ( $d$ s of .25 and .26 for fixed and random effects, respectively), or  
867 environmental risk factors alone ( $d$ s of .18 and .17). However, due to the relatively  
868 low number of studies investigating young people possessing both individual and  
869 environmental risk factors ( $n = 11$ ), this finding warrants cautious interpretation.  
870 DuBois and colleagues' (2011) reported larger effects when young people were  
871 either high in environmental risk and low in individual risk, or conversely, high in  
872 individual risk and low in environmental risk. For example, a young person may  
873 experience high levels of family stress and housing instability (i.e., high  
874 environmental risk) but display no academic challenges or problem behaviours (i.e.,  
875 low individual risk), or vice versa. When mentees experience high levels of  
876 individual and environmental risk, mentors (often volunteers) may not possess the  
877 skill set or capacity to address both complex personal vulnerabilities and contextual  
878 adversity (DuBois et al., 2011). Such experiences may even have a negative impact  
879 on mentors' psychosocial outcomes (Cavell et al., 2009; Colvin & Ashman, 2010;  
880 Rogers & Taylor, 1997; Spencer, 2007). As one example, mentoring young people  
881 high in both individual and environmental risk factors has been linked with adverse  
882 shifts in mentors' self-rated attitudes (declines in perceived self-efficacy) and  
883 personality characteristics (decrements in mentors' level of openness,  
884 conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness) at the end of the mentorship  
885 (Faith et al., 2011). However, in contrast to DuBois et al.'s reviews (2002; 2011),  
886 Raposa et al. (2019) identified no differences in effect sizes based on mentee  
887 individual and environmental risk factor status.

888 For those high in environmental risk factors, mentoring may be particularly  
889 beneficial because it enables the mentee to receive exposure to a caring, supportive,  
890 and positive adult role model which they may otherwise not have access to (Anda,  
891 2001; McQuillin, Smith, & Strait, 2011). Further, mentoring may have the capacity  
892 to act as a 'corrective experience' for young people who have been exposed to  
893 dysfunctional family relations. Specifically, enabling them to re-associate how they  
894 identify and interact with significant others through the formation of a trusting and  
895 supportive relationship with their mentor (DuBois et al., 2011).

## 896 **2.5.2 Mentor Characteristics**

897 A number of mentor characteristics have been suggested as potential  
898 moderators of programme effectiveness. Specifically, the mentor's age, gender, and  
899 background appear to influence the mentoring relationship and subsequent  
900 effectiveness of the programme.

901 **2.5.2.1 Age of Mentors.** Previous research has underscored that the mentor's  
902 age may be an important moderator of programme effectiveness (Raposa et al.,  
903 2019). There is evidence to suggest that student mentors volunteering within  
904 secondary school and college programmes may be less competent in comparison to  
905 older volunteer mentors (Grossman, Chan, Schwartz, & Rhodes, 2012). As one  
906 example, student mentors may be more likely to establish unrealistic academic and  
907 personal expectations for their mentee (Leyton-Armakan, Lawrence, Deutsch,  
908 Williams, & Henneberger, 2012) and may feel overwhelmed by the complexities of  
909 mentees lives (Grossman et al., 2012). Further, student mentors may be unable to  
910 complete the mentoring relationship due to their own unpredictable timetables, time  
911 constraints, and academic commitments (Grossman et al., 2012). However, due to a  
912 lack of variation across mentor age groups in DuBois et al's (2002; 2011) reviews,  
913 no reliable analysis was able to be performed, and the effects of mentor age remained  
914 unclear. Further, mentor age was not a significant moderator of programme  
915 effectiveness throughout Raposa and colleagues' review (2019). Consequently, it  
916 may be that mentors of varying ages have the potential to show comparable levels of  
917 effectiveness, and other factors are more influential in determining the impact of  
918 mentoring programmes.

919 **2.5.2.2 Gender of Mentors.** Research investigating the impact of mentor  
920 gender on mentee outcomes remains unclear. For instance, DuBois et al. (2002)  
921 found no differences in effect size based on the gender of mentors, while, no gender  
922 analysis was conducted by DuBois et al. (2011) due to insufficient variation in the  
923 gender of mentors across studies. In the work of Raposa et al. (2019), significant  
924 differences were found in the impact of mentoring based on the percentage of male  
925 mentors within the sample, with larger effects found in samples that had a higher  
926 percentage of male mentors ( $B = 0.36, t = 2.14, p < .05$ ). This finding warrants  
927 cautious interpretation because mentoring programmes typically match mentor and  
928 mentee gender, which results in difficulties determining the impact of mentor versus  
929 mentee gender in the overall results.

930           **2.5.2.3 Background of Mentors.** Mentors who have prior experience in  
931 helping roles or professions (e.g., social workers and counsellors) have been found to  
932 be more effective in comparison to mentors who have none (DuBois et al., 2002;  
933 Raposa et al., 2019). Specifically, mentors with helping backgrounds may bring with  
934 them a valuable skillset and an accumulation of experience which enables them to  
935 approach relationship building with patience, kindness, and empathy. Such mentor  
936 attributes and interpersonal skills have been considered key ingredients of high-  
937 quality relationships and enables mentees to develop perceptions of emotional safety  
938 (Kanchewa et al., 2017). When mentors have prior experience in helping  
939 backgrounds, they may enter mentoring relationships with higher levels of self-  
940 efficacy, a variable that has been associated with successful mentor-mentee  
941 relationships (Dutton, Bullen, & Deane, 2018; Karcher, Nakkula, & Harris, 2005;  
942 Keller, 2005; Raposa, Rhodes, & Herrera, 2016; Strapp et al., 2014). For instance,  
943 mentors with high self-efficacy have been shown to provide more consistent support  
944 and to persevere during challenges with their mentees (Karcher et al., 2005; Parra,  
945 DuBois, Neville, Pugh-Lilly, & Povinelli, 2002; Strapp et al., 2014). Comparatively,  
946 mentors with low self-efficacy have been shown to give up more easily during  
947 challenges with mentees, due to feeling overwhelmed and unappreciated (Hamilton  
948 & Hamilton, 1992; Karcher et al., 2005; Strapp et al., 2014). These findings suggest  
949 that mentors should be selected who have prior experience in helping domains.  
950 However, this may be dependent on the overall goals and intended outcomes of  
951 programmes. For instance, there is also evidence of stronger effects for mentoring  
952 when the educational/occupational background of mentors suited the specific goals  
953 of the mentorship (e.g., utilising mentors with teaching backgrounds when the goal  
954 of mentoring is to enhance mentees' academic attainment) (DuBois et al., 2011).

### 955 **2.5.3 Programme Characteristics**

956           Over the past few decades, there has been variation in the characteristics of  
957 mentoring programmes, which may influence the benefits that young people obtain  
958 from it (Raposa et al., 2019). Specifically, consideration of the setting, duration, and  
959 outcomes of programmes are warranted.

960           **2.5.3.1 Setting.** The setting of mentorships (e.g., educational or community  
961 contexts) have been theorised to account for differences in mentees' engagement,  
962 behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes (McQuillin et al., 2011). However, no  
963 differences in effect sizes were reported by Dubois et al. (2011) and Raposa et al.

964 (2019). Interestingly, however, previous research has questioned the effectiveness of  
965 school-based mentoring in comparison to community-based mentoring (DuBois et  
966 al., 2002; Karcher, 2008; McQuillin et al., 2011). Such questions have been raised  
967 because, when mentoring is delivered within an educational context, restrictions may  
968 be placed on the frequency (amount of contact per week) and length (months or  
969 years) of the mentoring relationship (McQuillin et al., 2011). As such, this may limit  
970 mentees' access to a prolonged period of support and may prevent the formation of a  
971 connection between the mentor and mentee (DuBois & Karcher, 2014). In addition, a  
972 high proportion of mentors within the school context are school or college-age  
973 mentors, typically unable to commit to mentorships beyond a semester or school year  
974 (Herrera et al., 2007). It can also take a considerable time-period (up to three months)  
975 to match mentors with mentees within this setting (e.g., Hansen, 2005; Herrera, Sipe,  
976 McClanahan, Arbreton, & Pepper, 2000). The limited time commitment is  
977 concerning because previous research has underscored that mentorships may need to  
978 last for more than one year in order to produce favourable developmental outcomes  
979 (e.g., Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Consequently, limited time, as well as physical  
980 constraints of the school context, may result in mentoring activities that are restricted  
981 in scope and variety (McQuillin et al., 2011). In contrast, community-based  
982 programmes have the capacity and resources to be more intensive, for instance,  
983 aiming to last an average of 12 months (McQuillin et al., 2011). Such enduring  
984 mentoring relationships may provide the mentor with sufficient time to emotionally  
985 connect with their mentee and to tailor their practices, thus enhancing the likelihood  
986 of establishing a secure, trusting, and high-quality mentorship (DuBois & Karcher,  
987 2014).

988 **2.5.3.2 Duration.** As alluded to in the previous section, the effect of  
989 relationship duration was examined across all reviews (i.e., DuBois et al., 2002;  
990 2011; Raposa et al., 2019). Early research had linked mentorship duration to mentee  
991 development, with longer relationships leading to more favourable mentee  
992 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes (e.g., Grossman & Rhodes,  
993 2002). However, in contrast, within DuBois and colleagues' review (DuBois et al.,  
994 2002; 2011) they reported no differences in programme effects based on the duration  
995 of relationships, while Raposa and colleagues' (2019) found larger effect sizes for  
996 mentoring programmes comprising shorter meetings.

997           Mentoring programmes that require a substantial time commitment often  
998 experience difficulty recruiting mentors who are willing to invest a significant  
999 amount of their time (usually voluntarily) to a young person's development. As such,  
1000 there are often long waiting lists due to an insufficient number of mentors to meet  
1001 demands (Grossman, Chan, Schwartz, & Rhodes, 2012; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002;  
1002 Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016). Moreover, when mentors are recruited, they may be  
1003 unable to make a year-long commitment and consequently, many programmes  
1004 experience high attrition rates resulting in mentoring relationships terminating earlier  
1005 than expected (e.g., six months or shorter) (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). However,  
1006 when mentorships allow for shorter duration and place less demands on mentors,  
1007 there may be an increased likelihood that mentors will volunteer and fulfil the  
1008 mentoring relationship (Herrera, 1999; Herrera & Karcher, 2014). Hence,  
1009 mentorships which are shorter in duration may have potential to close the mentoring  
1010 gap; that is, the gap between the number of young people who require a mentor and  
1011 the number of young people who currently receive access to one (Leyton-Armakan et  
1012 al., 2012).

1013           Early termination of mentoring relationships has been shown to adversely  
1014 affect mentees engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes (Downey,  
1015 Lebolt, Rincon, & Freitas, 1998; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes, 2002).  
1016 Interestingly, however, such negative mentee outcomes may not be attributable to the  
1017 shorter duration directly but more so the expectation that the mentee had for a longer,  
1018 more sustained relationship (Karcher, 2008). Mentees may already enter mentoring  
1019 relationships with internalised doubt that others may not be able to accept and care  
1020 for them, due to either the absence of, or insecure and disorganised attachments with  
1021 their own family members (Bowlby, 1982; Kanchewa, Yoviene, Schwartz, Herrera.,  
1022 & Rhodes, 2018; Levy, Ayduk, & Downey, 2001; Madia & Lutz, 2004; Noam &  
1023 Hermann, 2002). As a consequence, such vulnerable mentees may perceive that they  
1024 are responsible for problems in subsequent adult interactions (Grossman & Rhodes,  
1025 2002). Challenging upbringings can enhance the likelihood of a mentee developing  
1026 rejection sensitivity, whereby, they may overreact to a mentor's behaviour, question  
1027 intentions, and whether or not the mentor genuinely cares, and fear that they may  
1028 suddenly be abandoned (Kanchewa et al., 2018). Rejection sensitive mentees may  
1029 also be more likely to behave aggressively, encounter communication difficulties,  
1030 and adverse psychosocial outcomes, such as loneliness and depression (Downey et

1031 al., 1998; McLachlan, Zimmer-Gembeck, & McGregor, 2010). It is, likely, therefore,  
1032 that fulfilling duration commitment is more important than the actual duration of the  
1033 mentorship (Grossman et al., 2012).

1034 **2.5.3.3 Outcome Domain.** Mentoring programmes have focused on  
1035 addressing a wide range of academic, behavioural, and psychosocial outcome  
1036 domains (Raposa et al., 2019). Across all three reviews (DuBois et al., 2002; 2011;  
1037 Raposa et al., 2019), the type of outcome assessed was not a significant predictor of  
1038 effect size. Of concern, despite the proliferation of mentoring programmes and the  
1039 development of evidence-based guidelines over the past few decades (e.g.,  
1040 MENTOR and the National Mentoring Resource Centre), the benefits of mentoring  
1041 across a wide range of academic, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes have not  
1042 improved (DuBois et al., 2002; 2011; Raposa et al., 2019). Overall effect sizes have  
1043 remained relatively small, ranging from 0.18 to 0.21 (DuBois et al., 2002; 2011;  
1044 Raposa et al., 2019).

1045 Although such effect sizes (0.18 to 0.21) are considered small according to  
1046 Cohen's (1988) guidelines, they do fall within the medium range of empirical  
1047 guidelines for the average effect sizes of primary prevention programmes for young  
1048 people (Raposa et al., 2019; Tanner-Smith et al., 2018). However, in comparison to  
1049 primary prevention programmes serving a general population of young people  
1050 (Tanner-Smith et al., 2018), individuals selected for mentoring programmes tend to  
1051 already be displaying various risk factors and difficulties. Thus, there may be greater  
1052 room for improvement for those participating in mentoring in contrast to primary  
1053 prevention programmes (Raposa et al., 2019). Further, it is difficult to compare  
1054 findings across outcome domains due to inconsistencies in how constructs are  
1055 categorised and assessed (DuBois et al., 2002; 2011; Raposa et al., 2019).

#### 1056 **2.5.4 Conclusion**

1057 According to the meta-analytic reviews, to maximise the effects of mentoring  
1058 programmes, it is apparent that mentors may need to tailor their style of mentoring in  
1059 order to be responsive to the mentees gender, age, and developmental stage. To  
1060 develop high-quality mentoring relationships, the mentor may also need to approach  
1061 relationship building with patience, kindness, and empathy, and ideally, they should  
1062 have prior experience in helping roles and professions (e.g., social workers and  
1063 counsellors). Interestingly, the fulfilment of the mentoring relationship may be more  
1064 important than the actual duration of the mentorship, and in order for disengaged

1065 young people to receive significant academic, behavioural, and psychosocial  
1066 benefits, mentoring may need to be supplemented with various other modalities  
1067 (Goodman, 1999; Grossman et al., 2012).

## 1068 **2.6 Positive Youth Development Programmes**

1069 Positive youth development (PYD) programmes are those which encompass a  
1070 strengths-based approach, emphasising the potential for, and plasticity of, human  
1071 development and growth (Bowers et al., 2010). This type of approach views  
1072 disengaged young people as individuals to be nurtured, valued, and cared for,  
1073 seeking to provide an enriching and empowering experience, where they can  
1074 cultivate their ideas, creativity, assets, and capacities (Callingham, 2013; Roth &  
1075 Brooks-Gunn, 2003). The overall aims of PYD programmes are to enhance young  
1076 people's unique strengths and internal resources (i.e., asset development) through  
1077 providing exposure to external resources, support, and opportunity (i.e.,  
1078 environmental enhancement) (Lerner, Phelps, Alberts, Forman, & Christiansen,  
1079 2007; Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019; Snyder & Flay, 2012). Such programmes have  
1080 been considered a promising approach for enhancing academic, behavioural, and  
1081 psychosocial outcomes amongst young people (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak,  
1082 & Hawkins, 2004; Curran & Wexler, 2017). However, such benefits may be  
1083 especially important for disengaged young people as they encounter a heightened  
1084 risk of academic failure, behavioural-related issues, and adverse psychosocial  
1085 outcomes (Sanders, Munford, Thimasarn-Anwar, Liebenberg, & Ungar, 2015).

1086 Over the past few decades, PYD programmes have grown significantly and  
1087 there have been many meta-analytic and narrative reviews that have assessed the  
1088 overall impact of such programmes on young people (e.g., Catalano et al., 2004;  
1089 Gavin, Catalano, David-Ferdon, Gloppen, & Markham, 2009; Shepherd et al., 2010).  
1090 While some reviews have illustrated evidence of effectiveness, others have reported  
1091 mixed or inconclusive findings (Catalano et al., 2004; Gavin et al., 2009; Shepherd et  
1092 al., 2010). Such reviews, however, have varied considerably in relation to the  
1093 inclusion criteria (e.g., design of the programmes, characteristics of young people,  
1094 and the specific outcomes examined). For instance, while some reviews have focused  
1095 solely on programmes conducted in the United States (Catalano et al., 2004), others  
1096 have focused on universal populations and assessed specific outcomes, such as  
1097 sexual and reproductive health (Gavin et al., 2009; Shepherd et al., 2010).

1098           Consequently, the impact of PYD programmes on a range of academic,  
1099 behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes remains unclear. Investigations are also  
1100 warranted to identify the programme features and characteristics which may enhance  
1101 the overall effectiveness of programmes. To date, two meta-analytic reviews have  
1102 been completed (i.e., Ciocanel, Power, Eriksen, & Gillings, 2017; Durlak,  
1103 Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010), which have examined the effectiveness of PYD  
1104 programmes on academic, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes among  
1105 disengaged young people.

1106           Within this work, the programme features and characteristics which may  
1107 enhance their effectiveness were reviewed. Durlak and colleagues' (2010) review  
1108 focused on a mixture of young people, those experiencing risk factors (e.g., low  
1109 socioeconomic status and behaviour-related issues), and young people displaying no  
1110 pre-existing risk factors. In comparison, Ciocanel et al.'s (2017) review comprised  
1111 young people displaying pre-existing risk behaviour (e.g., low self-perceptions and  
1112 academic attainment) and young people deemed at risk of displaying risk behaviours  
1113 in the future (e.g., high risk of teenage pregnancy).

1114           Durlak and colleagues' (2010) meta-analysis examined the effects of PYD  
1115 after-school programmes (e.g., education/classroom sessions, social skills training,  
1116 work-based placements, and leadership activities) on children and adolescents' (aged  
1117 5 – 18 years old) personal and social skill development. The review included  
1118 findings from 68 after-school programmes conducted between 1980 and 2007. To be  
1119 eligible for inclusion, programmes had to have a control group, adult supervision,  
1120 and include the development of one or more personal or social skills. The personal  
1121 and social skills consisted of problem-solving, conflict resolution, self-control and  
1122 discipline, leadership, decision-making, and the enhancement of self-esteem and self-  
1123 efficacy.

1124           Overall, statistically significant improvements were reported in self-  
1125 perceptions ( $d = 0.34$ , 95% CI = 0.23 – 0.46), bonding to the educational context ( $d =$   
1126 0.14, 95% CI = 0.03 – 0.25), pro-social behaviour ( $d = 0.19$ , CI = 0.10 – 0.29),  
1127 achievement test scores ( $d = 0.17$ , CI = 0.06 – 0.29), school grades ( $d = 0.12$ , CI =  
1128 0.01 – 0.23), and reductions in problem behaviours ( $d = 0.19$ , CI = 0.10 – 0.27).  
1129 However, attendance ( $d = 0.10$ , CI = -0.01 – 0.20) and drug use ( $d = 0.10$ , CI = 0.00  
1130 – 0.20) failed to reach statistical significance. There was also substantial  
1131 heterogeneity in the effects ( $Q = 306.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ).



1132 Ciocanel et al. (2017) examined the effects of PYD programmes conducted  
1133 between 1992 and 2014. In total, twenty-four studies were included, comprising  
1134 23,258 young people (aged 10 – 19 years old). The aims of the meta-analysis were to  
1135 assess the effects of PYD programmes on: 1) the promotion of positive outcomes;  
1136 and, 2) the reduction of risk behaviour. The programmes had to address at least one  
1137 of the PYD objectives (e.g., promotion of social, emotional, cognitive, behavioural,  
1138 and moral competence, development of clear and positive identity, and enhanced  
1139 self-efficacy; see Catalano et al., 2002), had to be delivered outside of school hours  
1140 (i.e., community-based or delivered within the school, outside normal school hours),  
1141 and had to adopt a randomised controlled design. Programmes utilised a wide range  
1142 of strategies and formats including education/classroom sessions, social skills  
1143 training, leadership opportunities, and work-based placements.

1144 Overall, it was concluded that the PYD programmes had a small but  
1145 statistically significant effect on academic attainment ( $g = 0.22$ , 95% CI = 0.07 –  
1146 0.38) and psychological adjustment ( $g = 0.17$ , 95% CI = 0.04 – 0.31). No statistically  
1147 significant effect was reported for sexual risk behaviours ( $g = 0.05$ , 95% CI = –0.00  
1148 to 0.12), problem behaviour ( $g = 0.05$ , 95% CI = –0.00 to 0.110), or positive social  
1149 behaviours ( $g = 0.04$ , 95% CI = -0.11 – 0.21). Young people lower in risk factors  
1150 were deemed to receive more benefit from the programmes in comparison to young  
1151 people higher in risk factors. However, the studies examined were deemed to have  
1152 methodological limitations, with problems associated with the randomisation and  
1153 allocation of participants to groups (selection bias) and a lack of blinding of outcome  
1154 assessors (detection bias). As such, this limits the ability to form inferences regarding  
1155 the overall impact of PYD programmes.

1156 Drawing together the findings from both reviews and the broader literature,  
1157 there is inconsistency regarding the impact of PYD programmes for disengaged  
1158 young people, with effect sizes remaining relatively small. There appear to be a  
1159 range of programme features and characteristics that enhance or hinder overall  
1160 effectiveness (Ciocanel et al., 2017; Durlak et al., 2010).

### 1161 ***2.6.1 Characteristics of Participants***

1162 In this section, the relationship between young peoples' risk factor status,  
1163 overall group composition, the age/developmental stage of young people, and the  
1164 timing of re-engagement programmes will be discussed.

1165           **2.6.1.1 Group Composition.** There is evidence that young people high in  
1166 risk-factor status are more likely to benefit from PYD programmes when they are  
1167 surrounded by young people with low-risk factor status (i.e., mixed group  
1168 composition) (Curran & Wexler, 2017). Interestingly, previous research has  
1169 highlighted concerns that placing high-risk young people together for a protracted  
1170 period of time may create unintended iatrogenic consequences, which may have a  
1171 detrimental effect upon a young person's developmental outcomes and life trajectory  
1172 (Cho, Hallfors, & Sanchez, 2005; Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999; Dishion,  
1173 Poulin, & Burraston, 2001). Unintended negative effects may be due to 'deviancy  
1174 training' and deviant peer contagion, whereby there is an encouragement and  
1175 modelling of deviant and disruptive behaviour among young people creating a  
1176 perception that such problematic behaviour is desirable and normative (Dishion et  
1177 al., 1999; Jacob & Lefgren, 2003; Lansford et al., 2020). Studies have reported an  
1178 association between deviancy training and increases in violent, anti-social behaviours  
1179 (Capaldi et al., 2001; Dishion, Andrews, & Crosby, 1995; Dishion et al., 1997;  
1180 Gottfredson, 1987), substance abuse (Dishion, Capaldi, Spracklen, & Li, 1995; Duan,  
1181 Chou, Andreeva, & Pentz, 2009), and lower levels of emotional and behavioural  
1182 school engagement (Li, Lynch, Kalvin, Liu, & Lerner, 2011).

1183           Deviant and disruptive behaviour may be cultivated through observation,  
1184 imitation, and reinforcement within groups, especially during adolescence (Cho et  
1185 al., 2005), as they are at a developmental period characterised by complex emotional,  
1186 physical, biological, cognitive, and social changes (Ciocanel et al., 2017; Harter,  
1187 2012; Li, 2011). It is also during adolescence when young people are particularly  
1188 sensitive to peer influence and experience an enhanced propensity towards risk-  
1189 taking behaviours (e.g., substance use, truancy, violence, and criminality) (Casey,  
1190 Jones, & Hare, 2008; Poulin, Dishion, & Burraston, 2001). Consequently, in the  
1191 context of disengaged young people, it has been proposed that placing high-risk  
1192 young people together for a prolonged period may enable them to resonate and  
1193 affiliate with other challenging and deviant peers, rather than providing an  
1194 opportunity to socialise and interact with young people possessing more positive  
1195 characteristics, behaviours, and aspirations (Cho et al., 2005; Cooper, Chavira, &  
1196 Mena, 2005; Hebert & Reis, 1999; Rumberger, 1983). Such findings underscore the  
1197 importance of programmes ensuring group diversity and introducing a mixed group

1198 of young people (high and low risk-factor status) to help cultivate a more desirable  
1199 peer-to-peer environment (Curran & Wexler, 2017).

1200           **2.6.1.2 Age/Developmental Stage.** Early adolescence (i.e., aged 10 – 14  
1201 years old) is a developmental period when young people may begin to demonstrate  
1202 signs of disengagement and disaffection (Nelson & O’Donnell, 2012). The early  
1203 adolescent period may be a particularly valuable time to intervene through PYD  
1204 programmes as young people are considered more susceptible to re-engagement  
1205 during this developmental stage (Gracey & Kelly, 2010). Consequently, young  
1206 people’s engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes should be monitored  
1207 during early adolescence and if any challenges are identified, they should receive  
1208 access to early academic, psychosocial, and behavioural support (Nelson &  
1209 O’Donnell, 2012; Riglin, Petrides, Frederickson, & Rice, 2014). The implementation  
1210 of programmes during early adolescence may prevent challenges becoming deeply  
1211 entrenched and enhance the likelihood of school completion and positive  
1212 developmental trajectories (Toth & Manly, 2019). However, despite research  
1213 highlighting the importance of early identification and the implementation of  
1214 programmes during early adolescence, Ciocanel et al. (2017) concluded that  
1215 programme effects were similar regardless of age and the timing of re-engagement  
1216 programmes.

### 1217 **2.6.2 Characteristics of Programmes**

1218           There are a number of programme characteristics which have been  
1219 considered to influence the effects of PYD programmes. Specifically, programme  
1220 practices, community partnerships, and the opportunities provided for work-based  
1221 learning appear to be influential.

1222           **2.6.2.1 Recommended SAFE Practices.** The implementation of four  
1223 practices have been shown to moderate programme effectiveness (i.e., SAFE:  
1224 Sequenced, Active, Focused, and Explicit) (Durlak et al., 2010). Programmes that  
1225 included all four of these practices reported statistically significant effects and were  
1226 more effective in the development of young peoples’ personal and social skills (12  
1227 percentile increases between programme and control group). For instance, successful  
1228 programmes involved a coordinated sequence of activities that helped young people  
1229 adopt a step-by-step approach to acquiring new skills and competencies (i.e.,  
1230 Sequenced) (Durlak et al., 2010). There is also evidence that programmes were  
1231 effective when they provided opportunities for young people to be actively involved

1232 in the learning process (i.e., Active) through role plays, behavioural rehearsal, and  
1233 cooperative learning activities (Durlak et al., 2010; Law & Shek, 2012).

1234         Alongside sequenced activities and active involvement in the learning  
1235 process, programmes report more favourable outcomes when they provided young  
1236 people with a sufficient amount of time and support to enable them to assimilate  
1237 information and to effectively develop their knowledge and understanding (i.e.,  
1238 Focused) (Durlak et al., 2010). Finally, the findings also suggest that programmes  
1239 were more effective when they provided clear and specific learning objectives, in  
1240 order for young people to understand what they were expected to learn (i.e., Explicit)  
1241 (Bond & Hauf, 2004; Durlak et al., 2010; Maharaj-Landaeta, 2019). Such clarity,  
1242 structure, and specificity may be essential for disengaged young people due to the  
1243 instability experienced within their home and community contexts (Maharaj-  
1244 Landaeta, 2019).

1245         Importantly, it has been suggested that SAFE practices are not disconnected  
1246 or independent of each other and should be utilised in combination (Durlak et al.,  
1247 2010; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Taylor, Oberle,  
1248 Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). The relevance of these findings is confirmed by a  
1249 review of 213 school-based programmes (Durlak et al., 2011), which also found  
1250 SAFE practices moderated programme outcomes.

1251         **2.6.2.2 Involvement of the Community.** Successful PYD programmes have  
1252 enhanced strengths, assets, and competencies across multiple levels, comprising not  
1253 only young people but also through the involvement of the community (Bonell et al.,  
1254 2016; Bond & Hauf, 2004; Ciocanel et al., 2017; James & Jurich, 1999). Partnerships  
1255 with the community have provided insight, expertise, resources, structure, financial  
1256 capital, and networks for the programme (Armstrong & Armstrong, 2004; Babiak &  
1257 Thibault, 2009; Gipson, Campbell, & Malcom, 2018; Iachini, Beets, Ball, &  
1258 Lohman, 2014). Such effective partnerships have also demonstrated to young people  
1259 that the community values the programme (O'Neil, 1990). Through collaboration  
1260 and co-ordination, young people are provided with access to information and visits to  
1261 community organisations where they can accumulate meaningful voluntary and/or  
1262 paid work experience (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003).

1263         However, the development of meaningful partnerships has been found to be  
1264 dependent upon partnership complementarity and fit, extensive planning and  
1265 collaboration time, consistent interaction and contact between key stakeholders,

1266 aligned political motives, collaborative interests, a shared vision (e.g., creating  
1267 employment opportunities for young people), and high levels of trust and  
1268 commitment (Bruening, Fuller, & Percy, 2015; Gipson et al., 2018; Lucidarme,  
1269 Cardon, & Willem, 2016; Lucidarme, Marlier, Cardon, Bourdeaudhuij., & Willem,  
1270 2013; Marlier et al., 2015). Such factors are crucial for the development of  
1271 sustainable partnerships and the overall effective delivery of the programme (Gipson  
1272 et al., 2018). Thus, when programmes utilise the support of community organisations  
1273 and form effective partnerships, they have been shown to expand the type of  
1274 activities and opportunities available within PYD programmes, enhance responsiveness  
1275 to the varied needs and interests of young people, and can produce long-term effects  
1276 through the creation of career opportunities (Bryan & Henry, 2012; James & Jurich,  
1277 1999).

1278 **2.6.2.3 The Inclusion of Work-Based Placements.** Programmes have been  
1279 shown to be more effective when they incorporate work-based placements and  
1280 vocational experiences in addition to classroom-based training (Catalano et al., 2002;  
1281 Ciocanel et al., 2017; James & Jurich, 1999). When learning is extended beyond the  
1282 classroom, young people have the opportunity to engage in experiential learning,  
1283 where they can practically apply skills within a working environment, form  
1284 connections with knowledgeable, supportive adults, and experience a position of  
1285 responsibility and leadership (Chen, 2011; Durlak et al., 2010; Mawn et al., 2017;  
1286 Maxwell, 1997). The inclusion of work-based placements may also provide exposure  
1287 to varied and flexible learning opportunities, which can be more tailored and  
1288 responsive to young people's interests, skills, and future employment prospects  
1289 (Gracey & Kelly, 2010; Hartas, 2011; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012).

1290 However, many work-based placements have been criticised due to providing  
1291 low-status, 'pseudo-vocational' experiences, which fail to provide young people with  
1292 qualifications that are recognised by employers (Hayward & Williams, 2011;  
1293 Simmons & Thompson, 2011), and do not sufficiently prepare young people with the  
1294 skills, attributes, and conceptual knowledge needed to compete within a demanding  
1295 job market (Simmons, 2009; Wolf, 2011). It is essential that there is an explicit and  
1296 authentic connection between a young person's vocational experiences and future  
1297 employment opportunities (James & Jurich, 1999; Kerka, 2003). Thus, PYD  
1298 programmes should provide young people with exposure to a succession of relevant  
1299 and meaningful vocational experience and employment preparation, in addition to

1300 theoretical information and knowledge (Hayward & Williams, 2011; Maxwell,  
1301 1997). Such authentic academic and work-based learning opportunities may facilitate  
1302 a successful and sustainable transition to further education or employment (Nelson &  
1303 O'Donnell, 2012).

### 1304 **2.6.3 Conclusion**

1305 To optimise the effectiveness of PYD programmes for disengaged young  
1306 people, there are several programme features and characteristics related to more  
1307 favourable academic, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes. Specifically, the  
1308 findings suggest that positive outcomes are more likely to occur if there is a mixed  
1309 group composition, SAFE practices are implemented, effective and meaningful  
1310 community partnerships are formed, and work-based placements and vocational  
1311 experiences are integrated alongside theoretical learning.

### 1312 **2.7 Sport and Physical Activity Programmes**

1313 Numerous sport and physical activity-based programmes have been  
1314 developed as potential strategies for improving academic achievement, behavioural  
1315 conduct, and psychosocial outcomes for disengaged young people (Whitley, Massey,  
1316 Camire, Boutet, & Borbee, 2019). Such programmes have been suggested because  
1317 they have the capacity to provide a safe and empowering environment, which can  
1318 help disengaged young people to foster internal resources, such as social and  
1319 emotional competencies, self-esteem, self-worth, self-expression, and a sense of  
1320 purpose, meaning, and vision (Coalter, 2016; Draper & Coalter, 2016; Forneris et al.,  
1321 2016; Petitpas, Vanraalte, & Cornelius, 2004; Spaaij, 2012; Whitley, Coble, &  
1322 Jewell, 2016; Whitley et al., 2019). Sport and physical activity programmes may  
1323 comprise various forms and strategies, including outdoor adventure, team sports,  
1324 skill-based (e.g., development of motor skills) physical activity, and physical fitness  
1325 programmes.

1326 Governments and policy makers have a heightened interest in utilising sport  
1327 and physical activity as a vehicle to help disengaged young people (World Health  
1328 Organisation, 2019). The evidence regarding the effectiveness of such programmes  
1329 for disengaged young people, however, remains relatively limited (Draper & Coalter,  
1330 2019; Haudenhuyse et al., 2012; 2014). To date, only two systematic reviews have  
1331 examined the impact of sport and physical activity programmes among disengaged  
1332 young people (i.e., Hermens, Super, Verkooijen, & Koelen, 2017; Lubans et al.,  
1333 2012).

1334 In 2012, Lubans and colleagues conducted a critical review, describing the  
1335 effectiveness of sport-based programmes published between 1990 and 2011 on the  
1336 social and emotional wellbeing of disengaged young people (aged 4 – 18 years old).  
1337 Eligible studies had to include quantitative assessments of social and emotional  
1338 wellbeing (e.g., resilience, self-esteem, anxiety, and depression). In total, 15 studies  
1339 were included, comprising three types of programmes: outdoor adventure; sport and  
1340 skill-based; and physical fitness programmes. Many of the studies reported  
1341 significant positive effects on outcomes such as self-esteem, self-concept, self-worth,  
1342 and resilience. However, the risk of bias among the studies was identified as high,  
1343 with the quality of evidence deemed ‘methodologically poor’. Consequently, Lubans  
1344 et al. (2012) concluded that although sport and physical activity may be a potential  
1345 strategy for improving social and emotional wellbeing in disengaged young people,  
1346 the high risk of bias across the included studies resulted in difficulties interpreting  
1347 the efficacy of such programmes.

1348 In 2017, Hermens and colleagues expanded on Lubans et al. work with a  
1349 systematic review of life skill development through sport-based programmes for  
1350 disengaged young people (aged 10 – 23 years old). Where possible, the review  
1351 explored the characteristics of the programmes that were necessary for life skill  
1352 development. Life skills were defined as those skills that allow individuals to  
1353 succeed in a range of environments, such as their home, school, and within their  
1354 community (Danish, Forneris, Hodge, & Heke, 2004). They were separated into  
1355 three categories: emotional life skills (e.g., self-esteem and self-worth), cognitive life  
1356 skills (problem solving and positive decision-making), and social like skills (e.g.,  
1357 teamwork and leadership) (Hermens et al., 2017). In total, 18 studies were included,  
1358 comprising sport and physical activity programmes, published between 1990 and  
1359 2014. Each study reported on either an emotional, cognitive, or social life skill, with  
1360 each study, indicating that at least one life skill improved for young people  
1361 participating in the sport-based programmes.

1362 In contrast to Lubans et al. (2012), Hermens and colleagues’ review  
1363 encompassed both qualitative and quantitative studies. Further, Hermens et al.’s  
1364 (2017) review only included programmes in which sport and physical activity were  
1365 the core component of the programme, excluding programmes that utilised sport and  
1366 physical activity in addition to various other modalities (e.g., mentoring). Hermens et  
1367 al.’s (2017) also investigated the conditions necessary for sport-based programmes to

1368 optimise positive outcomes for disengaged young people. The needs of young people  
1369 in high-risk environments are complex and may differ significantly to that of the  
1370 general population (Haudenhuyse et al., 2014). Thus, developing an understanding of  
1371 the conditions which may be most effective is integral to the implementation and  
1372 success of future programmes.

1373 Drawing together the findings from both reviews, it is evident that sport and  
1374 physical activity hold the potential as a programme strategy for disengaged young  
1375 people. In order to enhance programme development and implementation, there are a  
1376 number of features, characteristics, and settings of programmes which may influence  
1377 overall effectiveness.

### 1378 ***2.7.1 Type of Programme***

1379 Sport-based programmes can adopt various forms and strategies, including,  
1380 sport and skill-based, outdoor adventure, physical activity, and physical fitness  
1381 programmes, all of which may have different outcomes.

1382 **2.7.1.1 Outdoor Adventure Programmes.** In Lubans et al.'s (2012) review,  
1383 seven studies explored the impact of outdoor adventure programmes on disengaged  
1384 young people. In total, five studies reported significant improvements in social and  
1385 emotional wellbeing; including self-worth (Pommier & Witt, 1995), self-concept  
1386 (Wu & Hsieh, 2006), resilience (Bloemhoff, 2006; Green et al., 2000), and  
1387 perceptions of alienation and self-control (Cross, 2002). The remaining two studies  
1388 reported no significant programme effect on self-esteem (Kaiser, Smith, Heleski, &  
1389 Spence, 2006) self-concept, locus of control, or perceptions of juvenile justice  
1390 (Minor & Elrod, 1994). In Hermens and colleagues' (2017) review, one study  
1391 explored the impact of an outdoor adventure programme, indicating outdoor  
1392 programmes can lead to PYD if young people are to transfer the skills learnt during  
1393 outdoor activities to other environments and areas within their lives (Armour &  
1394 Sandford, 2013).

1395 Although outdoor adventure programmes have capacity to elicit favourable  
1396 social and emotional wellbeing outcomes, the precise mechanisms through which  
1397 such programmes work remains unclear. Previous research has theorised that outdoor  
1398 adventure activities provide young people with exposure to positive risk taking and  
1399 the opportunity to accomplish perceivably insurmountable challenges (Carty, Harper,  
1400 & Magnuson, 2019). As a result of overcoming such challenges, a young person can  
1401 realise their innate assets and strengths, which may shape their perception of what



1402 they are capable of achieving within education and the community (Lubans et al.,  
1403 2012; Minor & Elrod, 1994). Outdoor adventure programmes may also work by  
1404 helping young people to establish new relationships and connections, receive positive  
1405 social support from peers and facilitators, engage in unique and experiential learning  
1406 opportunities, and through the process of learning how to become more resilient  
1407 (Allan & McKenna, 2019; West & Crompton, 2001).

1408         Due to the limited number of studies, as well as methodological issues, based  
1409 on Hermens et al.'s (2017) and Lubans et al.'s (2012) reviews alone, it is difficult to  
1410 reach robust conclusions regarding the impact of outdoor adventure programmes on  
1411 social and emotional wellbeing and life skill development. Alongside the high risk of  
1412 bias there was insufficient reporting of baseline characteristics, no reporting of power  
1413 calculations, and inadequate descriptions of the process of randomisation in the  
1414 randomised controlled trials studies (Lubans et al., 2012). Further, the reviews  
1415 included only outdoor adventure programmes that were conducted between 1990 and  
1416 2014 (Hermens et al., 2017; Lubans et al., 2012).

1417         Since 2014, there has been a proliferation of research, that has evaluated the  
1418 impact of outdoor adventure programmes designed to impact disengaged young  
1419 people across a wide range of outcomes. This extant literature has demonstrated that  
1420 outdoor adventure programmes can lead to improvements in disengaged young  
1421 peoples' independence, assertiveness, self-esteem, self-regulation, resilience,  
1422 educational outcomes, and the development of a positive view of one's future  
1423 (Bowen, Neill, & Crisp, 2016; Bowers, Larson, & Sandoval, 2019; Gwyn, 2020;  
1424 Manner, Doi, & Laird, 2020; Norton & Watt, 2014). However, published work on  
1425 the features and characteristics of outdoor adventure programmes that contribute to  
1426 positive developmental outcomes remains limited, especially among disengaged  
1427 young people (Gwyn, 2020).

1428         **2.7.1.2 Sport-Based Programmes.** Research has demonstrated the capacity  
1429 of sport-based programmes as a vehicle for the development of life skills (Danish &  
1430 Nellen, 1997; Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2005). With disengaged young  
1431 people, life skills have been considered an important protective factor that can help  
1432 them navigate complex circumstances and provide a pathway for re-integration into  
1433 education or employment (Zimmerman et al., 2013). Hermens and colleagues'  
1434 (2017) review provides an overview of the impact of sport-based programmes on  
1435 emotional, cognitive, and social life skill development. Six studies explored the

1436 impact of sport and physical activity programmes on emotional life skills, with four  
1437 of them reporting improvements across a range of internalising symptoms (e.g.,  
1438 enhanced perceptions of mood, improvements in global self-worth, decreases in  
1439 anxiety, depression, withdrawal, and somatic complaints). These findings suggest  
1440 that sport and physical activity programmes have the capacity to decrease  
1441 internalising symptoms in disengaged young people. Eleven studies within the  
1442 Hermens et al. review, investigated cognitive life skills, which were divided into two  
1443 categories: self-regulation skills and self-esteem/confidence. Across the eleven  
1444 studies, at least one cognitive life skill improved. Fourteen studies reported on  
1445 developments in social life skills, with twelve studies highlighting improvements.

1446 All studies within the review reported at least one aspect of life skill  
1447 improvement across cognitive, social, or emotional domains. However, many studies  
1448 lacked a control group, and young people lower in individual and environmental risk  
1449 factors may have self-selected into the programmes. Research that addresses these  
1450 methodological concerns is needed to understand the efficacy of sport-based  
1451 programmes. Similar to the findings of Hermens and colleagues, Lubans et al.'s  
1452 (2012) identified that, based on seven sport and skill-based programmes and two  
1453 physical fitness programmes, sport-based programmes have the potential to lead to  
1454 favourable outcomes for disengaged young people. However, due to methodological  
1455 weaknesses, including a failure of studies to include a control group and limited  
1456 longitudinal follow-up designs, the authors suggested that these findings also warrant  
1457 cautious interpretation.

### 1458 ***2.7.2 Conducive Conditions***

1459 In order for sport-based programmes to benefit disengaged young people,  
1460 Hermens and colleagues' (2017) highlighted a number of conditions that may be  
1461 conducive to a young person's development. Specifically, programme facilitators  
1462 should establish an environment that is responsive and sensitive to the unique  
1463 complexities of such young peoples' needs (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012; Super,  
1464 Verkooijen, & Koelen, 2018). Unfortunately, if the sporting context does not embody  
1465 a supportive and understanding climate (e.g., a person-centred approach which  
1466 respects individuality, provides equal opportunities, and establishes emotional and  
1467 physical safety), disengaged young people may be particularly susceptible to feelings  
1468 of low self-esteem, worthlessness, self-perceptions of incompetence, rejection, and  
1469 isolation (Bean, Fortier, Post, & Chima, 2014; Luguetti, Oliver, Dantas, & Kirk,

1470 2017; Super, Hermens, Verkooijen, & Koelen, 2018). Negative experiences within  
1471 sport may potentially push disengaged young people down a spiral of vulnerability as  
1472 they may replicate the experiences encountered across various settings, including  
1473 education, family, and the community (Super et al., 2018). Consequently, an  
1474 amalgamation of negative encounters, and especially those within the sporting  
1475 environment, should be avoided as they may lead to young people becoming  
1476 disconnected from the realm of society and developing a heightened level of  
1477 resistance towards authority figures and those around them (Super, Wentink,  
1478 Verkooijen, & Koelen, 2017; 2019).

1479 Therefore, gains in disengaged young peoples' development may be more  
1480 likely to occur in sport-based programmes when: young people are actively involved  
1481 in the learning process; a sense of belonging is engendered; sport facilitators possess  
1482 certain attributes and characteristics; appropriate training, support, and supervision is  
1483 provided to facilitators; a task-involved motivational climate is created; and sport and  
1484 physical activity is utilised in addition to various other modalities (Hermens et al.,  
1485 2017).

1486 **2.7.2.1 Active Participants in the Learning Process.** Sport programmes  
1487 may elicit improvements in developmental outcomes when facilitators adopt a  
1488 constructivist approach to learning (Rovegno & Dolly, 2006). Constructivist  
1489 approaches emphasise the active involvement of young people in the learning  
1490 process, the importance of collaboration, and encourage young people to construct  
1491 their own knowledge and understanding (Bonnette, McBride, & Tolson, 2001; Light  
1492 & Wallian, 2008). Such collaboration and active participation may be achieved by  
1493 exposing young people to activities that require cooperation in small groups, problem  
1494 solving, critical thinking, developing solutions, supporting those around them, and  
1495 openly sharing their thoughts and feelings with their peers and the facilitator (Dyson,  
1496 2002; Light & Wallian, 2008; Moreau et al., 2014; 2018). In contrast, approaches  
1497 (e.g., behaviourist) which do not provide young people with independence,  
1498 autonomy, and ownership over the learning process, may deny young people the  
1499 opportunity to develop their creativity, critical thinking capacity, and as a  
1500 consequence, they may be more likely to experience alienation and demotivation  
1501 (Larson & Walker, 2018). Such findings point to the importance of programmes  
1502 facilitating active learning, providing opportunities for exploration, and cultivating a  
1503 sense of voice for disengaged young people, who may have previously been silenced

1504 (Mitra, 2008). This can empower young people to be more independent, and enable  
1505 key stakeholders to receive access to information, perspectives, and ideas that they  
1506 themselves do not possess (Cook-Sather, 2002; Fisette & Walton, 2014; Light &  
1507 Wallian, 2008; Mitra, 2008).

1508         Extensive research has found that disengaged young people become more  
1509 engaged and experience feelings of empowerment when they are incorporated as  
1510 decision makers (Bonhauser et al., 2005; Bruening, Dover, & Clark, 2009; Fisette &  
1511 Walton, 2014; Luguetti, Oliver, Kirk, & Dantas, 2015). When programmes are  
1512 designed collaboratively with young people, each young person is provided with  
1513 autonomy over what they want to learn and are active participants in the decision  
1514 making and learning process (Bovill, Cook-Sather, & Felton, 2011). For instance,  
1515 when disengaged young people are provided with leadership responsibilities,  
1516 including an opportunity to establish their own learning objectives, decide which  
1517 sports they would like to participate in, and coordinate specific drills and activities,  
1518 they may, in turn, experience higher levels of engagement and motivation (Enright &  
1519 O’Sullivan, 2012; Oliver & Hamzeh, 2010; Oliver et al., 2009; Whitley et al., 2017).  
1520 Further, opportunities for active participation and self-directed learning may  
1521 challenge the traditional adult-to-young person relationship, the inherent power  
1522 imbalance, and the assumption among young people that they are subordinate to the  
1523 facilitator (Buelens, Theeboom, Vertonghen, & Martelaer, 2015; Freire, 2000;  
1524 Hartas, 2011; Luguetti et al., 2017; Spaaij, 2012). As such, this type of learning  
1525 environment may engender perceptions of psychological safety and young people  
1526 may be more likely to experiment and explore without fear of criticism from adults  
1527 (Light & Wallian, 2008).

1528         Through facilitators collaboratively co-constructing a sport and physical  
1529 activity programme with disengaged young people, they can develop a perception of  
1530 independence, autonomy, and control over their own actions and behaviours  
1531 (Martinek & Hellison, 1997), and be recognised as experts in their own learning  
1532 (Cook-Sather, 2002; Enright & O’Sullivan, 2010). Thus, facilitators should listen to  
1533 disengaged young people and work alongside them to develop a suitable programme,  
1534 rather than designing a programme based on their own assumptions regarding what  
1535 may or may not work (Fisette & Walton, 2014; Tilley & Taylor, 2018). Providing  
1536 disengaged young people with a position of authority may also lead to improvements  
1537 in their relationships with authority figures and the construction of a more positive

1538 self-identity (Luguetti et al., 2017). Such findings underscore the importance of  
1539 actively including young people in the overall design of programmes and providing  
1540 opportunities for disengaged young people to find voice during each stage of  
1541 programme delivery (Bovill et al., 2011).

1542           **2.7.2.2 Sense of Belonging.** Sport-based programmes may be particularly  
1543 effective when they foster a sense of belonging and acceptance among young people  
1544 (Anderson-Butcher, Riley, Amorose, Iachini, & Wade-Mdivanian, 2014; Draper &  
1545 Coalter, 2016; Sandford et al., 2006). When disengaged young people experience  
1546 feelings of belonging and acceptance, they may be more likely to openly share their  
1547 thoughts and feelings, depend on one another, and demonstrate improvements in  
1548 other important outcomes, such as teamwork, reciprocity, effort, self-control, and  
1549 social responsibility (e.g., responsivity to the needs of others and for the wellbeing of  
1550 the group) (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2014; Draper & Coalter, 2016; Martinek &  
1551 Hellison, 1997).

1552           In order to engender a sense of belonging, it has been suggested that  
1553 programmes should aim to keep participant numbers small and establish a group  
1554 identity through a range of strategies such as, the creation of team names, logos, and  
1555 unique celebrations (Martinek & Hellison, 1997; Spaaij, 2012). Moreover, there  
1556 should be a focus on facilitating opportunities for close personal relationships  
1557 through prolonged one-to-one informal discussions with facilitators and the  
1558 encouragement of peer support and collaboration (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2014).  
1559 Such opportunities enable young people to feel connected, supported, and cared for,  
1560 which may be particularly important for disengaged young people who, due to  
1561 adverse circumstances, may not have access to positive adult interaction or a strong  
1562 social support network, and may not experience feelings of belonging or connection  
1563 outside of the sporting environment (Martinek & Hellison, 1997; Rutter, 1990;  
1564 Spaaij, 2012). The absence of a nurturing and caring environment has been  
1565 considered predictive of young people's disenfranchisement and disconnectedness  
1566 with their lives (Nagpaul & Chen, 2019). Subsequently, for disengaged populations,  
1567 feelings of belonging and identification with others have been identified as a key  
1568 protective factor for navigating adolescence, and promoting favourable engagement,  
1569 behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes (Gordon & Song, 1994; Bonell et al., 2019).

1570           **2.7.2.3 Characteristics of Facilitators.** In order to work effectively with  
1571 disengaged young people, the characteristics and attributes of facilitators have been

1572 considered crucial to the promotion of young peoples' academic, behavioural, and  
1573 psychosocial adjustment (Riley & Anderson-Butcher, 2012). As an example,  
1574 facilitators who are flexible, caring, and have the ability to empathise and understand  
1575 situations from the young person's perspective, may be more likely to foster trust and  
1576 form meaningful connections with young people (Martinek & Hellison, 1997;  
1577 Nagpaul & Chen, 2019). More specifically, young people may be more likely to  
1578 resonate with facilitators when they come from similar impoverished backgrounds or  
1579 when they share an understanding of adverse circumstances (Crabbe, 2009;  
1580 Haudenhuyse et al., 2012). Through shared experiences and similar cultural capital,  
1581 facilitators may command higher levels of authority, authenticity, respect, and in  
1582 turn, young peoples' engagement and responsiveness (Crabbe, 2009; Haudenhuyse et  
1583 al., 2012; Jacobs, Wahl-Alexander, & Mack, 2019; Theeboom, Knop, & Wylleman,  
1584 2008).

1585         Previous research has also shown that when facilitators genuinely care about  
1586 the young person's development, pay attention and are responsive to the young  
1587 person, show an interest in their hobbies, volunteer time and energy, and establish a  
1588 safe and warm environment, young people are more likely to confront new sporting  
1589 activities and challenges (Larson & Walker, 2018; Riley & Anderson-Butcher, 2012;  
1590 Spaaij, 2012). However, when an environment is created in which young people are  
1591 unsure of facilitators intentions, question whether or not actions are authentic, and  
1592 perceive the environment to be unsupportive and pressure inducing, disengaged  
1593 young people are more likely to encounter feelings of anxiety, apprehension, and  
1594 self-doubt (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012; Super et al., 2019).

1595         The emphasis placed on relationship building within sport-based programmes  
1596 is consistent with findings from mentoring and PYD programmes, which suggest that  
1597 close and caring adult relationships are crucial to the enhancement of cognitive,  
1598 social, and emotional competencies for disengaged young people (Catalano, et al.,  
1599 2004). Negative relationships with others may lead to young people dropping out of  
1600 sport-based programmes and enhance the likelihood of seeking attention and  
1601 affirmation elsewhere, usually through deviant and criminal behaviour, creating false  
1602 perceptions of security (Armour & Sandford, 2013; Collingwood, 1997; Riley &  
1603 Anderson-Butcher, 2012; Theeboom et al., 2008).

1604         **2.7.2.4 Training and Support.** The actions and behaviours of facilitators  
1605 determine the degree to which disengaged young people experience positive

1606 developmental outcomes (Haudenhuyse et al., 2014; Nichols, 2007b; Theeboom et  
1607 al., 2008). Consequently, in order to enhance the efficacy of sport-based  
1608 programmes, it has been suggested that programmes should provide appropriate  
1609 training, support, and guidance to facilitators working with disengaged young people  
1610 (Coalter, 2011). Specifically, facilitators should receive guidance around: the  
1611 importance of developing knowledge of a young person's background and previous  
1612 experiences; how to empathise, listen, and communicate effectively with young  
1613 people; how to sensitively provide feedback while establishing a supportive and safe  
1614 environment (emotionally and physically); the importance of flexibility and  
1615 adaptability; and, how to encourage young people's active participation and  
1616 collaboration (Buelens et al., 2015; Haudenhuyse et al., 2014).

1617 **2.7.2.5 Motivational Climate.** A task-involved motivational climate (i.e.,  
1618 emphasis on individual development and learning) may be particularly beneficial for  
1619 disengaged young people (Coalter, 2007; Gould et al., 2012; Moreau et al., 2018;  
1620 Spruit et al., 2018; Whitley et al., 2017). It has even been suggested that in order to  
1621 protect and enhance a young person's psychosocial outcomes, the sporting  
1622 motivational climate created and the subsequent social interactions that take place  
1623 hold more influence than the content and activities delivered (Biddle, Gorely, &  
1624 Stensel, 2004; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995).

1625 For disengaged young people, perceptions of competence across many  
1626 domains including education, employment, and relationships tend to be lower than  
1627 the general population and they may be more susceptible to low self-esteem and  
1628 feelings of worthlessness (Andrews & Andrews, 2003; Super et al., 2019).  
1629 Consequently, an ego-involved sporting motivational climate, that emphasises  
1630 normative-based evaluation, the avoidance of mistakes, social comparisons,  
1631 outperforming others, and competitive success between disengaged young people  
1632 may not be conducive to favourable outcomes (Bortoli, Bertollo, Comani, &  
1633 Robazza, 2011; Elliot & Hulleman, 2017). Disengaged young people may not have  
1634 access to the internal resources (e.g., self-esteem and resilience) necessary to deal  
1635 effectively with the demands of an ego-involved climate and may be more likely to  
1636 withdraw effort and disengage (Andrews & Andrews, 2003; Brown & Fry, 2014;  
1637 Smith, Smoll, & Barnett, 1995; Ullrich-French et al., 2012). Thus, facilitators and  
1638 practitioners should structure the sporting environment in a way that promotes  
1639 individual effort and progressive learning, allowing disengaged young people to

1640 accomplish personal goals and to experience feelings of competency and success  
1641 (Bean, Whitley, & Gould, 2014; Haudenhuyse et al., 2012; 2014).

1642 **2.7.2.6 Multi-Component Programmes.** When sport-based programmes are  
1643 complemented with various other modalities, they have demonstrated favourable  
1644 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes for disengaged young people  
1645 (Bruening, et al., 2009; Haudenhuyse et al., 2014; Parker, Morgan, Farooq,  
1646 Moreland, & Pitchford, 2019). Previous research has shown that when sport and  
1647 physical activity are utilised in addition to components such as mentoring (Coalter,  
1648 1989, 2000), young people have access to resources, information, and knowledge to  
1649 be able to transfer the lessons learnt throughout the sporting environment to other  
1650 areas including education, home, community, and the workplace. For instance, the  
1651 support of a mentor can provide young people with an opportunity to actively reflect  
1652 on the skills developed during sport and to practice applying these skills (e.g., self-  
1653 discipline, perseverance, conflict resolution) within their daily lives (e.g., education,  
1654 relationships, health, and wellbeing) (Bean & Forneris, 2017).

1655 Further, the various modalities enable young people to receive exposure to  
1656 prolonged one-to-one guidance and theoretical content, which they may not have  
1657 received through a sport-based programme alone. Subsequently, the accumulation of  
1658 mentoring and sport and physical activity has been shown to stimulate young  
1659 people's independent thinking, helping to change negative self-perceptions and self-  
1660 defeating thoughts, promoting the formation of a positive identity (Bruening et al.,  
1661 2009). In addition to one-to-one mentoring and sport and physical activity  
1662 programmes, the inclusion of work-based placements, may enable young people to  
1663 acquire the experience, practical skills, attitudes, and behaviours necessary to secure  
1664 long-term employment (Chen, 2011; Spaaij, 2012).

### 1665 **2.7.3 Conclusion**

1666 Sport and physical activity programmes show promise to be a powerful  
1667 programme strategy for disengaged young people experiencing adverse academic,  
1668 behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes. However, in order to enhance the efficacy  
1669 of sport and physical activity programmes, there is a need to consider the  
1670 characteristics and features of programmes which can determine overall  
1671 effectiveness. Specifically, programmes are found to be more effective when: young  
1672 people are actively involved in the learning process; young people experience  
1673 feelings of belonging; facilitators are flexible, caring, and are able to see situations



1674 from the young person's perspective; facilitators have received adequate training,  
1675 support, and guidance for working with disengaged young people; facilitators create  
1676 a task-involved motivational climate; and sport is utilised in addition to various other  
1677 modalities and resources (e.g., mentoring).

## 1678 **2.8 Thesis Aim**

1679 Taken together, although research has established a number of programme  
1680 features and characteristics that can enhance the overall effectiveness of programmes  
1681 for disengaged young people, one-to-one mentoring, PYD, and sport and physical  
1682 activity programmes alone continue to produce modest benefits (Ciocanel et al.,  
1683 2017; Hermens et al., 2017; Raposa et al., 2019). In order to optimise disengaged  
1684 young peoples' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes, a singular  
1685 programme may not be sufficient (Mawn et al., 2017; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012;  
1686 Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019). For instance, a recent meta-analysis of re-engagement  
1687 programmes for disengaged young people (Mawn et al., 2017), identified that, in  
1688 comparison to individual programmes, intensive, multi-component programmes that  
1689 combined both classroom and work-based learning were associated with higher  
1690 effect sizes for disengaged young people. As such, multi-component programmes  
1691 that comprise a diversity of resources, pathways, and options may be more likely to  
1692 accommodate the complex needs of disengaged young people (Rajasekaran & Reyes,  
1693 2019). To my knowledge, there is no empirical evidence regarding the impact of  
1694 multi-component programmes for this population, which have combined each  
1695 programme type (i.e., mentoring, PYD, and sport and physical activity).

1696 A promising pathway to enhance disengaged young peoples' engagement,  
1697 behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes, may be through a thoughtfully designed  
1698 multi-component programme that combines one-to-one mentoring, PYD, and sport  
1699 and physical activity programmes. Exposure to a wide range of modalities and  
1700 resources together, may resonate with the varied interests, needs, and capacities of  
1701 disengaged young people and trigger the necessary support mechanisms to enable  
1702 young people to re-engage in education, employment, or training (Rajasekaran &  
1703 Reyes, 2019). In order to effectively evaluate the engagement, behavioural, and  
1704 psychosocial outcomes of multi-component programmes, there is a need for theory-  
1705 driven evaluation approaches to identify the contexts and mechanisms through which  
1706 a combination of modalities and resources may or may not work (Rajasekaran &  
1707 Reyes, 2019). Against this background, the aim of the current thesis was to use

1708 realist evaluation to understand how, and under which circumstances multi-  
1709 component programmes may impact the engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial  
1710 outcomes of disengaged students and young people who are not in education,  
1711 employment, or training.

### **Chapter 3: Realist Evaluation Methodology**

#### **1712 3.1 Chapter Overview**

1713           The preceding Chapters defined and conceptualised disengaged young  
1714 people, the types of challenges these young people encounter, the overall  
1715 effectiveness of current re-engagement programmes, and the characteristics of  
1716 programmes that can facilitate or constrain positive developmental outcomes among  
1717 disengaged young people. Based on the available literature, it was evident that a  
1718 singular programme may not be sufficient to re-engage young people and that  
1719 published knowledge on the effectiveness of multi-component programmes and  
1720 theory-driven evaluation approaches is scarce. As such, developing, implementing,  
1721 and evaluating multi-component programmes for disengaged young people was  
1722 deemed pertinent. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of realist  
1723 evaluation methodology and explain why this approach was most appropriate to  
1724 address the aim of this thesis. This chapter will also describe the key principles of  
1725 Scientific Realism, the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of realist  
1726 evaluation.

#### **1727 3.2 Complex Multi-Component Programmes and Disengaged Young People**

1728           As evidenced throughout the literature review, one-to-one mentoring, PYD  
1729 (i.e., classroom-based learning and work-based placements), and sport/physical  
1730 activity programmes are complex, with many features and characteristics that can  
1731 influence the likelihood of them being successful. When such modalities are  
1732 combined to form a multi-component programme the complexity is further  
1733 heightened due to the mixture of resources and the multiple, interconnected  
1734 components that are delivered to disengaged young people with varied needs,  
1735 attitudes, and interests, and implemented by different facilitators in a range of  
1736 settings (e.g., school and community contexts) (Shearn et al., 2017; Wong et al.,  
1737 2017).

1738           Multi-component programmes are also undertaken within a pre-existing  
1739 complex social system which is active, influenced by the environment, and shaped  
1740 by young peoples' volition, reasoning, and choice (Wong et al., 2016). The success  
1741 of such programmes is therefore highly dependent on the experiences created and  
1742 resources offered, as well as a young person's reasoning and responses to such  
1743 experiences and resources (Green, 2008; Jagosh, 2017; Plsek & Greenhalgh, 2001).  
1744 Moreover, the success of such programmes will be dependent upon young peoples'

1745 pre-established mind-sets and their willingness to learn and adapt (Pawson, 2013).  
1746 The fact that the efficacy of such programmes is dependent upon active participants,  
1747 with their own thoughts, feelings, and reactions, has major implications for the  
1748 methodological approach adopted (Pawson et al., 2004).

1749 Unfortunately, however, many researchers conduct programme evaluations  
1750 with the goal of minimising and controlling contextual influences and human  
1751 volition, perceiving human behaviour as a contaminator rather than recognising the  
1752 influence individuals and their behaviour will have on programme success (Marchal,  
1753 2011; Pawson, 2006). It is the thoughts, feelings, and emotional reactions of young  
1754 people which ultimately embody the programme and create outcomes (Pawson et al.,  
1755 2005; Pawson, 2006). As Pawson and Tilley (1997) highlight, it is not programmes  
1756 that work per se, rather, it is the young people engaging and choosing to make them  
1757 work.

### 1758 **3.3 Realist Evaluation**

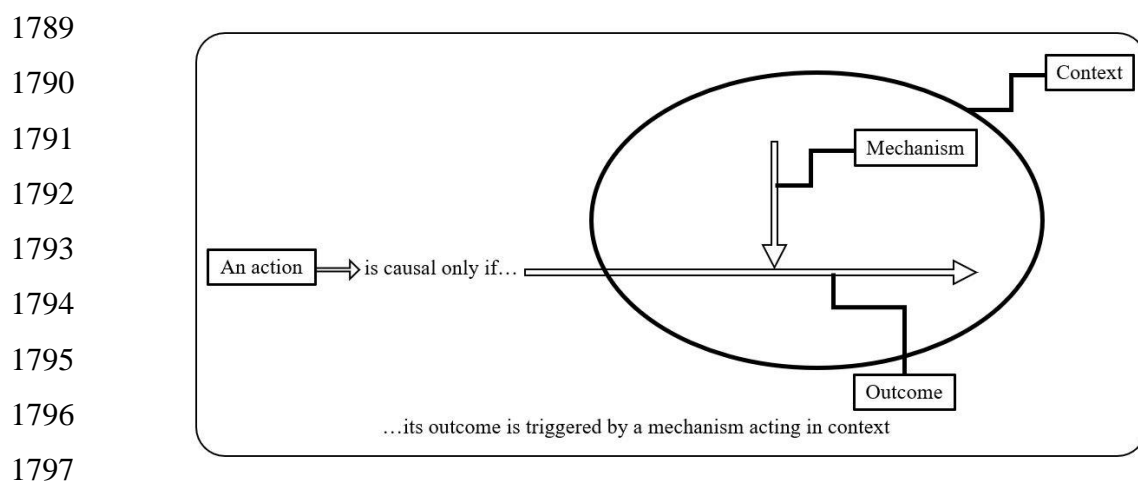
1759 Realist evaluation is a form of theory driven evaluation that aims to  
1760 understand the causal pathways through which complex programmes work (Pawson  
1761 & Tilley, 1997). Specifically, this methodological approach places emphasis not only  
1762 on the outcomes and overall effectiveness of programmes, but also on the role of  
1763 contextual factors and underlying mechanisms that bring about change (Chen, 1990;  
1764 Chen, 2018). As such, realist evaluation seeks to understand how programmes work,  
1765 for whom, and under which circumstances. To do this, realist evaluation aims to  
1766 develop, test, and refine programme theories through the examination of contexts,  
1767 mechanisms, and outcomes (Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

1768 Context refers to the ‘backdrop’ and conditions of programmes that are  
1769 necessary to trigger mechanisms (Jagosh et al., 2013; Willis et al., 2018). A  
1770 mechanism refers to underlying causal forces which determine the overall  
1771 effectiveness of programmes (Jagosh et al., 2013). In essence, a mechanism consists  
1772 of examining what it is about a programme which may elicit outcomes (Pawson,  
1773 2006; Pawson & Tilley, 2004; Willis et al., 2018). Outcomes refer to the desirable,  
1774 undesirable, anticipated, and unanticipated consequences of programmes resulting  
1775 from the generation of mechanisms in various contexts (Pawson & Tilley, 2004;  
1776 Willis et al., 2018). Thus, outcomes represent the changes in young people’s  
1777 reasoning as a result of the interaction between contexts and mechanisms (Pawson &  
1778 Tilley, 1997; Wong et al., 2016).

1779 To examine the relationship between context, mechanism, and outcomes,  
 1780 realist evaluation provides a heuristic tool in the form of a CMO configuration (i.e.,  
 1781  $C + M = O$ ) (Marchal, 2011; Pawson & Tilley, 1997). The CMO configuration is  
 1782 depicted in figure 3.1. Importantly, each element of the CMO (context, mechanism,  
 1783 and outcome) configuration is connected and contingent upon the other (Pawson &  
 1784 Tilley, 1997). Thus, an interaction always occurs between the context in which a  
 1785 programme is undertaken, the mechanisms which may or may not be triggered, and  
 1786 the subsequent outcomes (if any) which follow (Jagosh et al., 2013).

1787 **Figure 3.1**

1788 *The CMO Configuration* (Pawson & Tilley, 1997, p. 58).



1798 To explain, in the context of community members who hold preconceptions  
 1799 and stigma towards young people who are NEET, perceiving young people as  
 1800 problems who need to be managed and controlled, possessing limited potential and  
 1801 capacity to change (context), such young people may internalise these negative labels  
 1802 and subsequently, when provided with the opportunity to receive mentorship  
 1803 (programme strategy) and given access to information that can assist their re-  
 1804 engagement (mechanism), they may experience feelings of hopelessness due to a  
 1805 belief that they are a burden to the system and a waste of the mentor's resources and  
 1806 time (mechanism). Thus, the young person may not attend the mentoring sessions  
 1807 (outcome).

1808 In contrast, the same mentoring programme may be implemented in another  
 1809 location, where community members empathise with young people who are NEET,  
 1810 and have an appreciation and awareness that there are a cluster of factors which can  
 1811 contribute to a young person becoming NEET (e.g., a young person may be forced to  
 1812 leave education in order to care for their younger siblings and to earn money to assist

1813 their family) (context). In such contexts, the young person may internalise a feeling  
1814 that they are understood and valued, responding to the mentorship and access to  
1815 information with a perception that the mentor is caring and believing in them, and  
1816 they may feel a responsibility and obligation to not let their mentor down  
1817 (mechanism). In turn, they may adhere to the mentoring programme and re-engage  
1818 with education (outcome). This example illustrates the importance of the interaction  
1819 between context and mechanisms as the exact same mentoring programme triggered  
1820 different mechanisms and outcomes in different young people as a result of pre-  
1821 existing contextual factors (Pawson, 2013).

### 1822 **3.3.1 Context**

1823 Context refers to the setting and circumstances of programmes (Pawson,  
1824 2013). Specifically, the success of any programme depends upon the context in  
1825 which it is delivered, with programmes producing different outcomes across different  
1826 contexts. According to Pawson (2013), there are four essential contextual layers to  
1827 consider which may influence the outcomes of programmes:

- 1828 1) Individuals: The characteristics, backgrounds, capacities, competencies, and  
1829 past experiences of the young people and facilitators involved in the  
1830 programme (e.g., age, gender, level of education, upbringing, family  
1831 circumstances, and socioeconomic status).
- 1832 2) Interpersonal relationships: The relationships established between young  
1833 people and facilitators. These interpersonal relationships serve as the  
1834 foundation for young peoples' participation in programmes and may be more  
1835 influential than the resources and activities provided (Biddle, 2004; Jones &  
1836 Deutsch, 2011). Facilitators likely have a diversity of backgrounds and  
1837 experiences (e.g., social workers, educational psychologists, school personnel,  
1838 volunteers, and sports coaches) that may influence how they approach  
1839 relationship-building.
- 1840 3) Institutional setting: The rules, norms, and values which embody the  
1841 programme (e.g., cultural norms and values of community members, political  
1842 structures, loyalties, power dynamics, and physical space).
- 1843 4) Infrastructure: The social, health, economic, and cultural settings surrounding  
1844 the programme (e.g., employment opportunities, geographical location, access  
1845 to resources, and existing social connections within the area) (Jagosh et al.,  
1846 2013).

1847           The interaction between mechanisms and outcomes are contingent upon pre-  
1848 existing contextual factors (Pawson, 2013). Contextual factors produce causal impact  
1849 which can either constrain or facilitate the activation of mechanisms and the overall  
1850 success of programmes (Pawson, 2006b).

### 1851 **3.3.2 Mechanism**

1852           Within realist evaluation, mechanisms are an essential characteristic tool as  
1853 they provide causal explanation and elucidate the young person's reasoning (e.g.,  
1854 attitudes, beliefs, or their thought processes in a specific situation) to the resources  
1855 (e.g., knowledge, guidance, role modelling) offered by the programme (Belle et al.,  
1856 2016; Dalkin et al., 2015; Pawson, 2006b). It is through an understanding of  
1857 mechanisms that allows the evaluator to move beyond asking 'whether or not a  
1858 programme works' and instead explore 'how a programme may or may not work for  
1859 whom, under what circumstances, and why' (Pawson, 2006b).

1860           Mechanisms are difficult to identify as they are often hidden, dormant, and  
1861 sensitive to contextual differences (Jagosh, 2017; Pawson, 2008). Consequently, in  
1862 order to identify mechanisms, there is a need to search beneath the surface and to  
1863 focus on a deeper level of reality (Jagosh, 2017), to begin to understand why a young  
1864 person may be responding in a certain way. Realist evaluators recognise that every  
1865 individual is malleable and has the propensity to change, develop, and improve  
1866 (Jagosh, 2017; Rodriguez, 2015). As such, each young person regardless of  
1867 circumstances has the capacity and potential to re-engage with their academic  
1868 studies, complete school, and accomplish successful educational trajectories.  
1869 Successful programme outcomes, however, are contingent upon the effective  
1870 implementation of appropriate modalities and resources, which determine whether  
1871 underlying mechanisms are manifested or if they remain a latent potentiality (Jagosh,  
1872 2017).

1873           When working with programmes which rely upon young peoples'  
1874 interpretation and agency, mechanisms may not automatically activate via an on/off  
1875 switch (Dalkin et al., 2015). Rather, the process of activation may be more gradual  
1876 with mechanisms operating along a continuum, in line with the light generated by a  
1877 'dimmer switch' (e.g., full brightness may reflect the development of trust) (Dalkin  
1878 et al., 2015). Similar to a dimmer switch, mechanisms may vary in intensity or  
1879 emerge at a later stage due to changes in context or circumstantial factors which  
1880 trigger new volition and reasoning (Dalkin et al., 2015; Rodriguez, 2015).

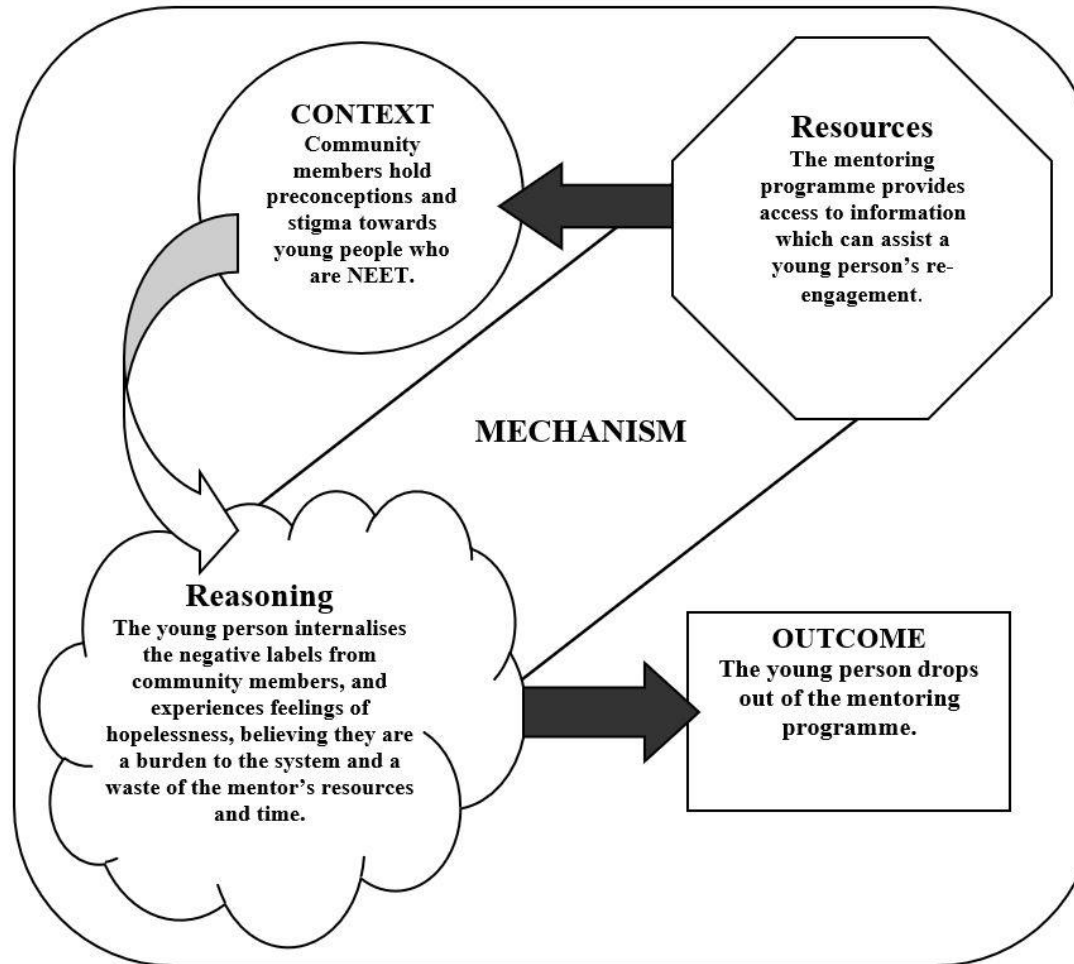
1881           Importantly, the mechanism is not synonymous with the programme strategy  
1882 (Astbury & Leeuw, 2010; Dalkin et al., 2015; Weiss, 1997). Adopting the example  
1883 of mentoring mentioned earlier, consider the following: If one-to-one mentoring is  
1884 associated with a reduction in school dropout, the causal mechanism may appear to  
1885 be the one-to-one mentoring. However, this is the programme strategy, not the  
1886 mechanism. The evaluator has to delve deeper by considering what resources the  
1887 one-to-one mentoring offers to young people? Is it exposure to new ideas,  
1888 perspective, and knowledge? Is it the influence of a positive role model? Is it  
1889 confidence building? Is it the opportunity to feel listened to and valued? Perceptions  
1890 of psychological safety? In turn, how do young people reason and respond to the  
1891 resource? How does it make them feel? What is their emotional response to the  
1892 resource(s) provided by one-to-one mentoring?

1893           Thus, the mechanism is the young person's reasoning to the resources  
1894 provided by the programme. It is the cognitive, emotional, and social reasoning that  
1895 is activated when young people engage with the resources of a programme (Jagosh,  
1896 2017; Weiss, 1997). To help distinguish between programme strategies, contexts,  
1897 and mechanisms (Marchal et al., 2012), Dalkin and colleagues (2015) expand on the  
1898 earlier work of Pawson and Tilley (1997) by splitting mechanisms into resources and  
1899 reasoning (see figure 3.2).



1900 **Figure 3.2**

1901 *Extension of Pawson and Tilley's (1997) model to aid operationalisation, adapted from Dalkin et al. (2015).*



### 1902 **3.3.3 Outcomes**

1903 Outcome patterns may be proximal, intermediate, or final (Jagosh et al.,  
1904 2013). Examples of outcomes include improved school attendance, engagement,  
1905 behaviour, and academic performance, social cohesion, self-efficacy, and  
1906 developments in knowledge and understanding (Jagosh et al., 2013; Jagosh, 2019).  
1907 Such outcomes are contingent on not only the appropriate ideas and resources  
1908 (mechanisms) but also the wider social, economic, and cultural factors surrounding  
1909 the programme (context) (Dalkin et al., 2014; Pawson, 2006). Programmes may  
1910 generate a range of successful and unsuccessful outcomes for each young person,  
1911 which may enable the researcher to identify patterns in behaviours and outcomes. In  
1912 realist evaluation, semi-predictable patterns in behaviours and outcomes are referred  
1913 to as demi-regularities (Wong, Greenhalgh, & Pawson, 2010). Demi-regularities  
1914 recognise that patterns of behaviour are semi-predictable as they are never static, in  
1915 that, young people's thoughts and feelings are always subject to change. Realist  
1916 evaluators therefore search for demi-regularities as opposed to outcome regularities,  
1917 as all mechanisms will be modified in different contexts (Pawson, 2006; Pawson &  
1918 Tilley, 1997; Wong et al., 2010).

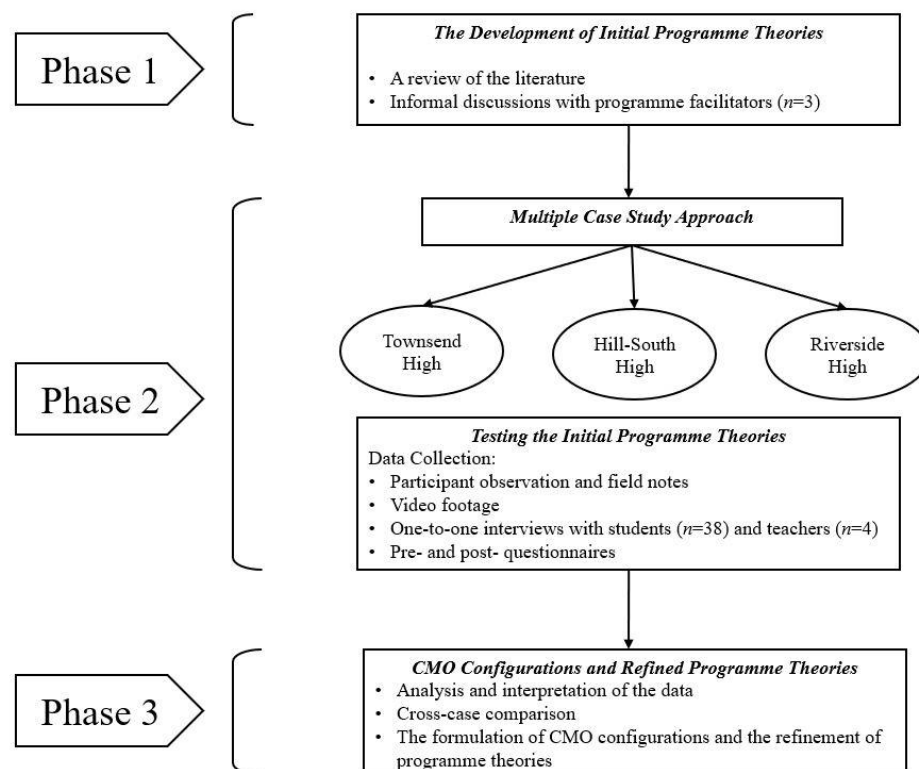
1919 Outcomes of programmes may inform the context of subsequent phases or  
1920 future programmes, thereby, producing a 'ripple effect' (Jagosh et al., 2015). As one  
1921 example, Jagosh and colleagues (2015) examined the impact of community-based  
1922 participatory research. During the first phase of their project, they discovered  
1923 underlying issues relating to a culture of mistrust between community stakeholders  
1924 and academic researchers (context). As a consequence, mechanism resources were  
1925 designed to build a sense of trust and rapport between community stakeholders and  
1926 academics. The outcome of the first phase of the project was early research  
1927 productivity and partnership growth due to the development of trust and reciprocity  
1928 between community stakeholders and academics. In turn, the context of the next  
1929 phase of the programme was pre-existing levels of trust, partnership, and  
1930 collaboration between community members and academics. The new context  
1931 therefore interacted with mechanisms to generate new outcomes (Jagosh et al.,  
1932 2015). As such, developing an understanding of how outcomes are generated is  
1933 essential in order to inform the design and tailoring of programmes, enhance the  
1934 likelihood of their effectiveness, and decrease the unanticipated adverse outcomes of  
1935 programmes (Jagosh, 2019; Wong, Greenhalgh, Westhorp, & Pawson, 2012).

### 1936 3.4 Realist Evaluation Design

1937 Realist evaluations are conducted in three broad phases (Cheyne et al., 2013;  
 1938 Gilmore et al., 2019). In phase one, initial programme theories are developed that  
 1939 aim to explain how the programme is expected to work. The initial programme  
 1940 theories elucidate the mechanisms that may trigger, the contextual elements  
 1941 necessary for mechanisms to trigger, and the outcomes of interest that will be visible  
 1942 if they trigger as anticipated (Westthorp, 2014; Wong et al., 2016). At phase two, the  
 1943 initial programme theories are tested, scrutinised, and expanded upon throughout the  
 1944 evaluation using multiple methods of data collection (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). The  
 1945 final phase of a realist evaluation involves the synthesis of evidence, the formulation  
 1946 of CMO configurations, and the refinement of programme theories which explain  
 1947 how the programme is or is not working, for whom, and under which contextual  
 1948 circumstances (Wong et al., 2016) (see figure 3.3 for an example of how these phases  
 1949 were used in Study 1).

#### 1950 Figure 3.3

*The three phases of Realist Evaluation.* Adapted from Cheyne et al. (2013) and Gilmore et al. (2019).



### 1951 ***3.4.1 Phase One: The Development of Initial Programme Theories***

1952 As explained, the initial programme theories aim to unpack how and why the  
1953 programme is expected to achieve its outcomes and include theorising the anticipated  
1954 interactions between contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes (Pawson & Tilley, 2004;  
1955 Shearn et al., 2017). To develop initial programme theories, researchers may review  
1956 programme documents, reports, previous evaluations, and access existing literature  
1957 relevant to each component of the programme (Gilmore, 2017). The researcher may  
1958 also engage with key stakeholders such as, programme facilitators, designers, and  
1959 managers, in order to understand stakeholders' expectations and perspectives  
1960 regarding how the various components of the programme may work, and the factors  
1961 anticipated to impact programme delivery and outcomes.

1962 During this process, rival theories can also be constructed, whereby,  
1963 alternative explanations are formulated unpacking why a programme may not be  
1964 successful or why it may lead to adverse and unintended outcomes in certain contexts  
1965 (Pawson & Tilley, 2004). Collectively, the document/literature review and  
1966 engagement with key stakeholders can provide complementary data that can be used  
1967 to finalise the initial programme theories (Mukumbang et al., 2016; Pawson & Tilley,  
1968 1997). Initial programme theories can then be articulated via if then statements: 'if  
1969 we implement X then this may lead to Y because...' or hypothetical CMO  
1970 configurations (Jagosh, 2017). The process of constructing initial programme  
1971 theories for the studies in this thesis are explained in the relevant chapters.

### 1972 ***3.4.2 Phase Two: Testing the Initial Programme Theories***

1973 During this phase, the initial programme theories and anticipated interactions  
1974 between contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes are tested using either (or both)  
1975 qualitative and quantitative methods (Pawson & Tilley, 2004). For instance, while  
1976 quantitative data can be useful to identify and compare outcome patterns at the  
1977 beginning and end of the programme, qualitative data is essential in order to  
1978 understand why changes in outcomes have occurred, by unpacking and exploring the  
1979 relationship between contexts, mechanisms, and programme modalities  
1980 (Mukumbang, Marchal, Belle, & Wyk, 2020; Pawson, 2013).

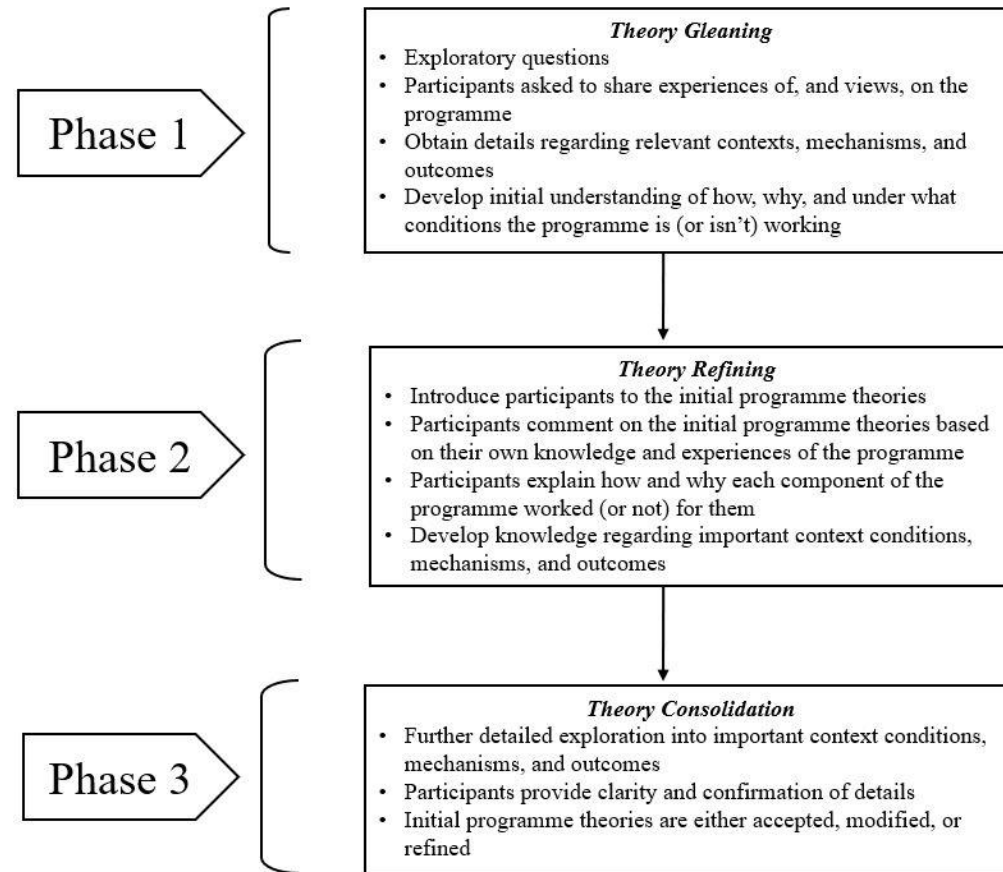
1981 In order to effectively explore the relationship between context conditions  
1982 and mechanisms, data collection methods and participants should be selected based  
1983 on their 'CMO investigation potential' (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). For instance, while  
1984 educators may be able to provide detailed information regarding the family

1985 background and psychological makeup of students' taking part in a school-based  
1986 programme (context), students may be able to offer important insight into the  
1987 resources and opportunities that the programme offers (mechanisms). As such,  
1988 participants have in-depth knowledge regarding how, why, and for whom the  
1989 programme may or may not be working and should be actively involved in refining  
1990 the initial programme theories through realist theory-driven interview techniques  
1991 (Gilmore, 2017; Manzano, 2016).

1992 **3.4.2.1 The Realist Interview.** The realist interview is a methodological  
1993 strategy used by realist evaluators to obtain knowledge about the relevant contexts,  
1994 mechanisms, and outcomes, and to refine programme theories based on the  
1995 experiences and perspectives of the participants involved (e.g., young people and  
1996 educators) (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Specifically, the realist interview presents the  
1997 participants with the initial programme theories for examination and offers the  
1998 participants the opportunity to accept, modify, and refine them based on their own  
1999 ideas, thinking, and experiences (Manzano, 2016; Mukumbang et al., 2020; Pawson,  
2000 1996). The process has been referred to as a teacher-learner cycle (Pawson, 1996),  
2001 whereby, the interviewer starts by explaining and teaching the participants the  
2002 specific programme theories (e.g., the programme was supposed to help you decide  
2003 what you may like to do after you finish school, by showing you the different types  
2004 of jobs available, and giving you the chance to practice working), and ends with the  
2005 participants teaching the researcher about the refined theories describing how each  
2006 component of the programme worked (or not) for them (Pawson & Tilley, 2004). To  
2007 guide the process of testing initial programme theories, Manzano (2016) proposed  
2008 three phases of interview: theory gleaning; theory refining; and theory consolidation.  
2009 These phases are summarised in figure 3.4.

2010 **Figure 3.4**

2011 *Phases in realist interviews. Adapted from Manzano (2016) and Mukumbang et al. (2020).*



### 2012 **3.4.3 Phase Three: CMO Configurations and Refined Programme Theories**

2013           The end product of a realist evaluation involves the synthesis of evidence, the  
 2014 analysis of data utilising the CMO configuration as the analytical framework, and the  
 2015 refinement of programme theories in order to explain how, why, for whom, and  
 2016 under what contextual circumstances the programme did or did not work (Pawson et  
 2017 al., 2005; Wong et al., 2016). During this phase, to enhance the articulation of  
 2018 programme theories, middle-range theories, which are at a higher level of  
 2019 abstraction, can be used (Merton, 1968; Shearn et al., 2017). Theory at the middle  
 2020 range is not specific to the programme under evaluation but can be used to  
 2021 comprehend complex human behaviour and social phenomena (e.g., sociological,  
 2022 and psychological theories) (Jagosh, 2018). Middle range theories produce  
 2023 transferable knowledge that can be applied across different contexts and help to  
 2024 enhance understanding of how and why programmes achieve their outcomes (Shearn  
 2025 et al., 2017). Collectively, the CMO configurations and refined programme theories  
 2026 provide an understanding of the effects (outcomes) of the programme, the resources  
 2027 of the programme that led to effects (mechanisms), and the type of circumstances in  
 2028 which these effects occurred (contexts) (Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

### 2029 **3.5 Realism**

2030           Realist evaluation is underpinned by realism. Realism is considered a  
 2031 methodological orientation, directly influencing the choice and selection of research  
 2032 methods (Pawson, 2006b; Pawson et al., 2004). The approach has its roots in both  
 2033 the philosophy of science and social sciences (Bhaskar, 2008; Collier, 1994; Harre,  
 2034 1978). Specifically, there are two widely recognised streams of realism within the  
 2035 social sciences: critical realism (Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson, & Norrie, 1998;  
 2036 Bhaskar, 2002) and scientific realism (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Pawson, 2006b). The  
 2037 key distinction between critical realism and scientific realism is how both approaches  
 2038 understand the ‘open systems nature of social explanation’ (Dalkin, 2014; Dalkin et  
 2039 al., 2015). Critical realists perceive that there will always remain a plethora of  
 2040 explanatory possibilities, of which some may be inaccurate and incorrect (Pawson,  
 2041 2006b). Thus, based on critical realism, the role of the social sciences is to critique  
 2042 the thoughts, beliefs, and actions, that underpin such false and inaccurate  
 2043 explanations (Archer et al., 1998; Bhaskar, 2002). In contrast, scientific realists adopt  
 2044 a more pragmatic perspective, accepting that although endless explanatory  
 2045 possibilities exist, the role of social science is to decide between alternative

2046 explanations and to investigate them through the development and testing of theories  
2047 (Pawson, 2006b).

2048           As such, while critical realism is philosophically driven, focused on ontology  
2049 and epistemology to explore broader societal issues (e.g., gender, social class),  
2050 scientific realism is methodologically driven, focused on the application of principles  
2051 to scientific practice (e.g., programme evaluation) (Jagosh, 2019a; Pawson & Tilley,  
2052 1997). A piecemeal approach is advocated in scientific realism, whereby, learning  
2053 occurs through theory testing and an accumulation of knowledge and evidence  
2054 generation (Jagosh, 2019a; Popper, 1999; 2002; Stelzer, 2016). It is through theory-  
2055 testing, that certain explanatory possibilities can be tested and either confirmed,  
2056 modified, or refined, facilitating the development of new solutions, ideas, and  
2057 theories (Stelzer, 2016). The scope of investigation under a scientific realist lens is  
2058 narrow as it would be impractical to do theory testing at the wider societal level  
2059 (Jagosh, 2019a). Scientific realism, which is underpinning this thesis, is the  
2060 methodological orientation embraced by realist evaluation and used to evaluate  
2061 complex programmes (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). The remainder of this chapter will  
2062 focus on the ontology and epistemology of scientific realism.

### 2063 ***3.5.1 Questions of Ontology and Epistemology***

2064           Ontological and epistemological assumptions influence the nature of  
2065 research (Furlong & Marsh, 2010). Ontological commitments relate to beliefs about  
2066 what exists, it is concerned with perceptions of reality and existence (Maxwell, 2012;  
2067 O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). Understanding an individual's ontological  
2068 assumptions is integral because how a researcher views reality will influence their  
2069 epistemological commitments (Dillon & Wals, 2006). Epistemology relates to  
2070 viewpoints on how perceptions of reality can be studied, understood, and known  
2071 (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). The ontological and epistemological beliefs and  
2072 orientations a researcher holds will influence the research questions they seek to  
2073 answer, the data collection methods adopted, engagement with participants, data  
2074 analysis, and the overall inferences formed (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Killam, 2013;  
2075 O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014).

2076           **3.5.1.1 Ontology and Epistemology of Scientific Realism.** Scientific  
2077 realism has been considered to occupy and reconcile a middle ground position  
2078 between post-positivism (emphasis on theory testing and a belief that there is an  
2079 external reality) and constructivism (reality and knowledge production is shaped by



2080 human minds and senses) (Bryman, 1989; Sayer, 2000; Westthorp, 2014). A key  
2081 principle of scientific realism is the ontological belief that there exists a mind-  
2082 independent reality, whilst also acknowledging that our knowledge of reality is  
2083 shaped according to our ideas, experiences, perception, and constructions (Gilmore,  
2084 2017; Maxwell, 2012). Thus, scientific realist ontology states that a real world exists  
2085 independent of how an individual perceives or constructs it (Maxwell, 2012; Sayer,  
2086 2000), whereas scientific realist epistemology recognises that how an individual  
2087 perceives and makes sense of reality will inevitably be a construction from their own  
2088 beliefs, experiences, and perspectives (Maxwell, 2012). For example, a young person  
2089 may believe that having a criminal record will not affect their employment prospects  
2090 but that does not mean that a criminal record will not impact upon employment  
2091 prospects because reality is separate from the young person's accounts and  
2092 descriptions of it (i.e., mind-independent reality) (Clark, 2015). As such, according to  
2093 scientific realism, our knowledge of reality is partial and fallible as there is more to  
2094 reality than what individuals are capable of processing and apprehending (Kemp,  
2095 2017; Maxwell, 2012; Sayer, 1992). The aim of scientific realism is to move towards  
2096 a closer understanding of an individual's version of reality through configurations of  
2097 contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes (Manzano, 2016).

### 2098 ***3.5.2 Principles of Scientific Realism***

2099         There are a number of key principles of scientific realism, including  
2100 ontological depth, generative causality, retrodution, and demi regularities.  
2101 Collectively, these principles unpack the ways in which scientific realism embraces  
2102 complexity and provides the rationale as to why this approach underpinned the  
2103 current thesis.

2104         **3.5.2.1 Ontological Depth.** An important principle of realism is the  
2105 stratification of reality into three layers: the empirical, the actual, and the real  
2106 (Bhaskar, 2008). The empirical domain relates to reality that has manifested and is  
2107 observable (Clark, 2008; Jagosh, 2017; Sayer, 2000). The actual domain includes the  
2108 observable manifested reality and a deeper level of reality which is not so readily  
2109 observable. Thus, the actual domain consists of mechanisms and outcomes that have  
2110 manifested, regardless of an individuals' capacity to perceive or observe. Finally, the  
2111 real domain encompasses both the activated mechanisms and relates to the invisible  
2112 structures, mechanisms, and causal powers which have the potential to be activated

2113 or the susceptibility to behave in specific ways (Clark, 2008; Jagosh, 2017; Sayer,  
2114 2000).

2115 All knowledge and perceptions are considered incomplete and fallible, the  
2116 ability to observe reality is dependent upon an individual's conception or  
2117 manifestation of reality according to their own experiences and perceptions (what an  
2118 individual has the capacity to sense) (Jagosh, 2017; Porter, 2015; Sayer, 2000). It is  
2119 within the domain of the real whereby realists acknowledge the existence of  
2120 underlying generative mechanisms, considered latent and dormant, that have the  
2121 potential to be activated (Jagosh, 2017; Westhorp, 2018). This idea of invisible  
2122 mechanisms existing at a deeper level of reality has been referred to as the ontology  
2123 of absence (Jagosh, 2017; Shearn et al., 2017).

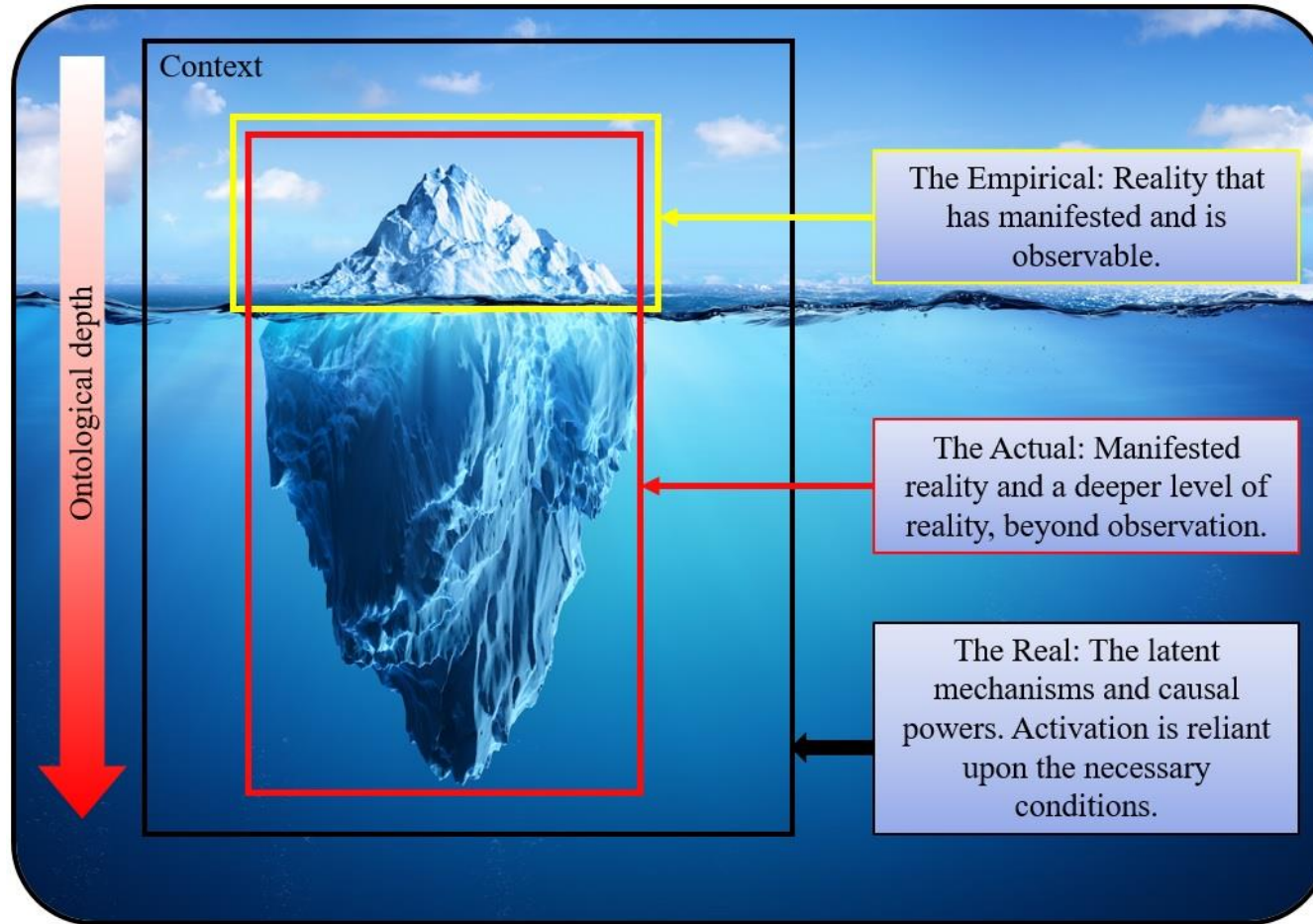
2124 To illustrate the empirical, the actual, and the real domain, Jagosh (2017;  
2125 2018; 2019) provides the metaphor of an iceberg (see figure 3.5). The part of the  
2126 iceberg existing above the surface of the water refers to the empirical domain, the  
2127 manifested reality that is viewable (e.g., an individual's accomplishments, the  
2128 qualifications, and awards they have achieved are able to be evidenced and are more  
2129 easily observable, including academic certificates and graduation ceremonies). The  
2130 domain of the actual includes the manifested reality and therefore, all of the ice,  
2131 regardless of whether it is on the surface or below the surface, and whether or not it  
2132 is observable (e.g., the reasoning and interpretation of the individual, including  
2133 feelings of validation and legitimisation). Finally, the real domain refers to the water  
2134 around the iceberg, consisting of the underlying and invisible mechanisms that have  
2135 the potential to be activated and the propensity to produce causal changes in the  
2136 actual domain, provided they are interacting with the necessary resources, under the  
2137 right contextual circumstances (Clark, 2008; Jagosh, 2017). The real domain is the  
2138 largest domain as it incorporates the mechanisms that are activated and the invisible  
2139 causal powers which have the potential to be activated (e.g., during the pursuit of  
2140 achieving qualifications, an individual will have activated many underlying  
2141 mechanisms existing in the domain of the real, including constructing knowledge and  
2142 understanding, cognitive development, financial sacrifices, the practice of applying  
2143 self-discipline and consistency, along with the dedication needed to persist in the  
2144 face of adversity).

2145

**Figure 3.5**

2146

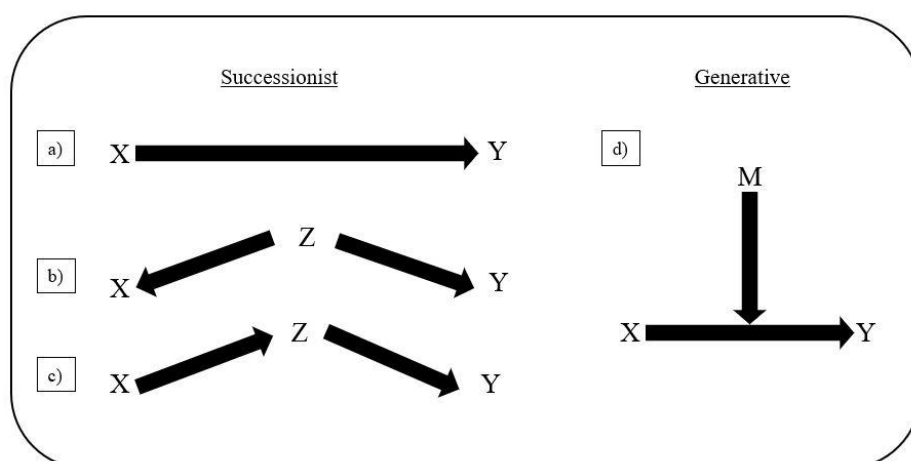
*The Iceberg Metaphor – The Empirical, The Actual, and The Real Layers of Reality. Adapted from Jagosh (2019).*



2147 **3.5.2.2 Generative Causality.** Scientific realism is based on the logic of  
 2148 generative causation, in that, individuals have potential mechanisms of causation that  
 2149 remain latent until they are generated within the right contexts (Marchal, 2011). The  
 2150 interaction between contexts and generative mechanisms therefore determines the  
 2151 outcomes that occur, and the aim of scientific realism is to obtain knowledge about  
 2152 the underlying process that leads to outcomes of interest (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). In  
 2153 order to explore the underlying process, scientific realism answers the question:  
 2154 ‘what is it about X that leads to Y?’ or ‘what is it about multi-component  
 2155 programmes that may lead to re-engagement?’. Contrastive questioning (e.g., ‘does  
 2156 X lead to Y?’) is underpinned by a successionist view of causation, that is focused on  
 2157 addressing whether or not a programme works, without answering the for whom,  
 2158 how, and why (see figure 3.6) (Marchal, 2011). Examples of successionist  
 2159 approaches encompass the ‘gold standard’ randomised controlled trial, experimental,  
 2160 and quasi-experimental designs (Pawson, 2008). Such approaches have received  
 2161 criticism from the scientific realist community for attempting to control context,  
 2162 human volition, and reasoning, which, are the ultimate causal pathways through  
 2163 which any outcomes of interest occur (Jagosh, 2019; Marchal et al., 2012; Pawson,  
 2164 2008; Pawson & Tilley, 2004).

2165 **Figure 3.6**

2166 *Successionist and Generative Models of Causation. Taken from Pawson and Tilley*  
 2167 *(1997; p. 68).*



2177 As explained, due to the active nature of programmes, a programme will  
 2178 produce different outcomes across different contexts, as every individual will  
 2179 respond to the resources of programmes in different ways (Belle et al., 2016; Jamal

2180 et al., 2015). It is, therefore, not possible to ask or answer a generalisable question of  
2181 whether or not a programme works, as the success of any programme will be  
2182 determined by pre-existing contextual factors (Jagosh, 2019). Rather, the  
2183 development of theory-based explanations that provide knowledge and insight into  
2184 how programmes work by unpacking the complex interaction between contexts,  
2185 mechanisms, and outcomes, which are transferable is possible (Belle et al., 2016;  
2186 Wong et al., 2016). New understandings in relation to important contexts and  
2187 mechanisms can be transferred to advance the design, implementation, and  
2188 innovation of future programmes (Jagosh, 2019). Transferability is therefore  
2189 advocated within scientific realism as this approach acknowledges the complex,  
2190 dynamic, and evolving nature of reality (Jagosh, 2019a). Although theories, contexts,  
2191 and mechanisms are relevant now, they may not be applicable to programmes in the  
2192 future. As such, they will always need to be tested again in different settings and  
2193 modified accordingly (Jagosh, 2019a; Wong et al., 2012).

2194         **3.5.2.3 Retroduction.** Retroduction is the technique through which  
2195 generative causation is uncovered (Aldamman, 2020). Specifically, retroduction  
2196 refers to the “idea of going back from, below, or behind observed patterns or  
2197 regularities to discover what produces them” (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2004, p.  
2198 972), and has been suggested to overcome the limitations associated with inductive  
2199 and deductive approaches to offer complexity-sensitive explanations (Blaikie, 2004).  
2200 Retroductive explanations include identifying and elaborating on the contexts and  
2201 mechanisms that are theorised to have generated outcomes (Hartwig, 2007;  
2202 Mukumbang et al., 2020). As such, retroduction allows a scientific realist to move  
2203 from an observed pattern of disengagement among secondary school students to  
2204 explanatory theories about the underlying mechanisms that contribute to  
2205 disengagement (Chindarkar, 2007; Olsen, 2010). In doing so, this mode of inference  
2206 utilises multiple data sources, stakeholder input, creativity, and imaginative thinking,  
2207 to theorise ‘why do things appear as they do?’ and ‘why is the world the way it is?’  
2208 (Clark, 2015; Olsen, 2010).

2209         **3.5.2.4 Demi Regularities.** The scientific realist searches for patterns in  
2210 behaviour or human experience, which can provide causal explanations for why  
2211 individuals behave in certain ways. Specifically, they search for demi regularities, a  
2212 phrase introduced by Lawson (1997). A demi regularity is a patterned occurrence of  
2213 reality which acknowledges and anticipates variations (Lawson, 1997). Such

2214 variations may occur as a result of contextual and individual factors (Jagosh, 2018;  
2215 2019a). For example, a student's engagement during academic lessons may improve  
2216 when a teacher authentically listens to the student and the student in turn, feels that  
2217 they have been heard and understood. Consequently, the action of listening and the  
2218 response of feeling heard can trigger mechanisms of engagement and attentiveness,  
2219 which can be considered a demi regularity. However, there may be circumstances  
2220 when engagement is not triggered and therefore the aim of realism would be to  
2221 develop an understanding of why this might be.

2222         In contrast, research operating under an empirical paradigm, tends to search  
2223 for regularities with any variation considered an outlier or anomaly (Kemp, 2017;  
2224 Sayer, 1992). While no consideration is paid to contextual factors within the  
2225 empirical paradigm, realism embraces outliers and variations in patterns, seeking to  
2226 further explore the contextual factors underpinning them. Thus, scientific realism  
2227 attributes equal value and importance to both patterns and variations (Pawson, 2008).

### 2228 **3.6 Conclusion**

2229         Realist evaluation methodology and scientific realism are particularly well  
2230 suited to the evaluation of complex multi-component programmes and populations  
2231 (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Through the formulation of CMO configurations and the  
2232 testing and refinement of initial programme theories, programme evaluators can  
2233 unpack how programmes may work, for whom they work, under what circumstances,  
2234 and why different outcomes occur (Wong et al., 2016). As such, realist evaluation  
2235 methodology and the philosophy of scientific realism embrace complexity and were  
2236 considered most appropriate to address the aim of this thesis.

## Chapter 4: Study 1

### 2237 **4.1 Introduction**

2238           School completion and educational qualifications are considered powerful  
2239 predictors of health (Dalgard, Mykletun, Rognerud, Johansen, & Zahl, 2007;  
2240 Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007). Completing secondary school with qualifications  
2241 provides access to further educational and employment opportunities, and  
2242 subsequently more informed health decisions (Ramsdal et al., 2018). In contrast,  
2243 leaving school early, without qualifications, has been shown to enhance the  
2244 likelihood of involvement in health-comprising behaviours, including smoking,  
2245 alcohol, drugs, sedentary behaviour, and physical inactivity (Lantz et al., 1998;  
2246 McWhirter et al., 2017). In addition, school dropout is associated with prolonged  
2247 unemployment, poverty, a wide range of psychological and physical health problems,  
2248 and premature mortality (Centre for Promise, 2014a; Ruglis, 2009). As such, the  
2249 decision to stay in or leave school, may be one of the most critical decisions a young  
2250 person makes during their adolescent development (Brooks-Gunn, Guo, &  
2251 Furstenberg, 1993). Consequently, the implementation of programmes to enhance the  
2252 likelihood of school completion and improve educational qualifications for  
2253 disengaged students can be viewed as public investments, that have the potential to  
2254 produce long-term social and economic benefits for society (Belfield & Levin, 2009).

2255           The success of programmes to encourage school engagement are dependent  
2256 upon the extent to which they account for and address the complex and varied  
2257 reasons disengaged students may decide (or be forced) to leave school (Rajasekaran  
2258 & Reyes, 2019). For instance, many disengaged students encounter adverse  
2259 experiences and challenges including poverty, peer bullying, academic failure,  
2260 neglect, emotional and physical abuse, parental death, parental substance abuse, and  
2261 parental criminality (Kirlic et al., 2020). Exposure to such adverse circumstances can  
2262 have a detrimental effect on these students' educational engagement (e.g., investment  
2263 and active effort), behavioural (e.g., disobedience and absenteeism), and  
2264 psychosocial (e.g., low self-worth and perceived competence) outcomes, each of  
2265 which are salient predictors of school dropout (Ruglis, 2009; Witte et al., 2013). To  
2266 counter such issues, programmes to help disengaged students remain in school need  
2267 to provide access to high-quality relationships, support structures, and developmental  
2268 opportunities, which can enhance students' engagement, behavioural, and  
2269 psychosocial outcomes (Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019).

2270 As outlined in Chapter 2, over the past few decades, numerous programmes  
2271 have been implemented in an attempt to re-engage young people within education.  
2272 Such programmes have included one-to-one mentoring (e.g., Raposa et al., 2019),  
2273 PYD programmes including, classroom-based learning (e.g., Ciocanel et al., 2017)  
2274 and work-based placements (e.g., Chen, 2011), and sport and physical activity (e.g.,  
2275 Lubans et al., 2012), but the effectiveness of these programmes has demonstrated  
2276 modest overall effects and it remains unclear what works for this population, under  
2277 which circumstances (Mawn et al., 2017; Raposa et al., 2019). It has been suggested  
2278 that a combination of programmes may enhance the likelihood of positive  
2279 developmental outcomes with disengaged young people (Mawn et al., 2017).  
2280 However, to my knowledge, there are no multi-component programmes for  
2281 disengaged young people that have combined all available modalities (i.e.,  
2282 mentoring, classroom-based learning, work-based placements, sport and physical  
2283 activity). The specific combination of mentoring, classroom-based learning, work-  
2284 based placements, and sport and physical activity may provide exposure to a  
2285 diversity of resources and enable students to access many options and pathways,  
2286 which could enhance the likelihood of them successfully engaging numerous  
2287 students. However, delivery and subsequent evaluation of such a multi-component  
2288 programme is required to support this suggestion.

2289 One such multi-component programme is TACKLE. This is an Ospreys in  
2290 the Community school programme, which was designed to enhance disengaged  
2291 students' engagement and behaviour in core subject lessons (e.g., English,  
2292 Mathematics, and Science) and reduce psychosocial challenges. The programme  
2293 combines one-to-one mentoring, classroom-based workshops, work-based  
2294 placements, and sport and physical activity and is delivered within school settings.  
2295 Recognising the potential benefit of multi-component programmes for disengaged  
2296 students, as well as the lack of evaluation of such programmes, the aim of the current  
2297 study was to conduct a realist evaluation to understand how and under what  
2298 circumstances the TACKLE programme may impact disengaged students'  
2299 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes. Accordingly, the following  
2300 research questions were formulated:

- 2301 1. How, why, for whom, and in what contexts does TACKLE impact (if at all)  
2302 students' engagement and behaviour?



- 2303 2. How, why, for whom, and in what contexts does TACKLE impact (if at all)  
2304 students' psychosocial outcomes, including academic, social, physical, job  
2305 competence, behavioural conduct, and global self-worth?  
2306 3. What are the underpinning mechanisms explaining the impact (if any) of  
2307 TACKLE?

## 2308 **4.2 Method**

### 2309 **4.2.1 Methodology**

2310 This study utilised realist evaluation methodology (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) to  
2311 evaluate the impact of TACKLE across three schools in Wales. As detailed in  
2312 Chapter 3, realist evaluation begins through the development of an initial programme  
2313 theory or theories, which seek to explain how the programme is expected to achieve  
2314 its outcomes (Mukumbang et al., 2019). The programme theory elucidates the  
2315 mechanisms that may activate, the contexts necessary for mechanisms to activate,  
2316 and the outcomes that will be visible if they activate as anticipated (Westhorp, 2014;  
2317 Wong et al., 2016). The initial programme theories, causal explanations, and  
2318 anticipated interactions between context, mechanisms, and outcomes are then tested  
2319 throughout the evaluation using a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative  
2320 methods (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Throughout data collection and immersion, initial  
2321 programme theories are modified and refined (Wong et al., 2016). The end product  
2322 of a realist evaluation is refined theories and CMO (context-mechanism-outcome)  
2323 configurations which explain how the programme is or is not working, for whom,  
2324 and under which circumstances (Wong et al., 2016). A realist evaluation approach  
2325 was particularly suitable for this study as it enabled an understanding of the  
2326 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes students experience during  
2327 TACKLE, the underpinning mechanisms explaining how and why students  
2328 achieve/do not achieve these outcomes, and the specific contexts and circumstances  
2329 in which these outcomes are achieved.

### 2330 **4.2.2 Study Design**

2331 The realist evaluation was conducted using a multiple/collective case study  
2332 approach (Stake, 1995) with Townsend high school<sup>2</sup>, Hill-South high school, and  
2333 Riverside high school being three of the cases. A case study has been defined as a  
2334 thorough investigation which takes into account a variety of perspectives in order to

---

<sup>2</sup> The schools have been given pseudonyms.

2335 understand the intricacies of a phenomenon of interest (e.g., an individual, group,  
2336 institution, programme, project, or system) in a naturalistic environment (Crowe et  
2337 al., 2011; Simons, 2009; Yin, 2009; Hodge & Sharp, 2017). As such, it is deemed an  
2338 appropriate choice of method when the researcher is unable to control or manipulate  
2339 the phenomenon and the research questions are driven predominately by “how” and  
2340 “why” (Yin, 2009; 2018), as was the case in this study. Specifically, a multiple case  
2341 study provided a platform to examine the impact of TACKLE across three schools,  
2342 which led to enhanced theorising and an in-depth exploration of the interaction  
2343 between context, mechanisms, and outcomes (Hodge & Sharp, 2017), enhancing the  
2344 opportunities for a successful evaluation.

2345         When conducting case study research, the use of several sources of data,  
2346 drawing from both qualitative and quantitative techniques, is encouraged in order to  
2347 capture complexity and to reveal detailed and richer understanding regarding how a  
2348 programme may or may not be working (Bishop, 2012; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017;  
2349 Yin, 2009). Methodological eclecticism is also recommended in realist evaluation  
2350 (Pawson & Manzano-Santaella, 2012; Pawson & Sridharan, 2010; Wong et al., 2016)  
2351 because the combination of multiple data sources can provide contrasting, distinct,  
2352 but complementary information that can elicit a richer understanding of context,  
2353 mechanisms, and outcomes (Patton, 2015). As such, the key principles of multiple  
2354 case studies are methodologically suited to realist evaluation (Mukumbang et al.,  
2355 2019), and they are used regularly as a methodological approach to evaluating  
2356 complex, multi-component programmes delivered within educational settings  
2357 (Chmiliar, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Simons, 2009; Timmons & Cairns, 2012; Yin,  
2358 2009).

### 2359 *4.2.3 Cases and Participants*

2360         The programme took place in three schools from the Convergence region of  
2361 Wales. This region includes fifteen local authority areas in West Wales and the  
2362 Valleys. Each school was located in a socially and economically deprived  
2363 community.

2364         **4.2.3.1 The Schools.** In order to provide contextual background for each  
2365 participating school, information was collated from the most recent Estyn<sup>3</sup> inspection  
2366 reports (Estyn, 2020) and the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD; Welsh

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<sup>3</sup> Estyn is the education and training inspectorate for Wales.

2367 Government, 2019). WIMD calculates an areas overall level of deprivation based on  
2368 assessments across eight specific domains (i.e., income, employment, health,  
2369 education, access to services, community safety, physical environment, and housing)  
2370 (Welsh Government, 2019).

2371         **4.2.3.1.1 Townsend High.** The first school, Townsend High, is an English-  
2372 medium comprehensive school with approximately 1,000 students aged between 11-  
2373 19 years, situated in South West Wales (Estyn, 2020). Based on the latest inspection  
2374 report, the number of students eligible for free school meals exceeds the national  
2375 average (Estyn, 2020). A high number of students attending the school live in the  
2376 most socially and economically disadvantaged areas in Wales. According to the  
2377 latest Estyn report (2020), the school was identified as ‘adequate and needing  
2378 improvement’ across all inspection areas. Of note, the school’s location has remained  
2379 among the top 50 highest areas in deep-rooted deprivation in Wales throughout the  
2380 past fifteen years (Welsh Government, 2019). Specifically, the report identified  
2381 particularly high employment deprivation, low access to services, low community  
2382 safety, and a poor physical environment (Welsh Government, 2019).

2383         **4.2.3.1.2 Hill-South High.** The second school, Hill-South High, is a large  
2384 English-medium comprehensive school with approximately 1,400 students aged  
2385 between 11-18 years, located in South West Wales. According to data from the  
2386 inspection report, a high proportion of the student body are eligible for free school  
2387 meals and similar to Townsend High, many students reside in deprived areas (Estyn,  
2388 2020). Hill-South High was identified as ‘satisfactory’ across all inspection areas,  
2389 which was a significant improvement in comparison to their previous Estyn report.  
2390 The school is currently classified as belonging to a community first area and is within  
2391 the 10% most deprived areas in Wales (Welsh Government, 2019). Drawing on  
2392 information from the WIMD, the school’s location is within one of the ten most  
2393 deprived areas within Wales for health, employment, community safety, income, and  
2394 education (Welsh Government, 2019).

2395         **4.2.3.1.3 Riverside High.** The final school, Riverside High, consisted of a  
2396 comprehensive school with around 700 students aged 11-16 years, based in South  
2397 West Wales. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals, living in  
2398 deprived areas, and on the special educational needs register was reported as higher  
2399 than the national average (Estyn, 2020). Unlike Townsend High and Hill-South  
2400 High, Riverside High was considered to be operating at a ‘good’ level overall by

2401 Estyn. However, the school's location has remained amongst the top fifty highest  
2402 areas in deep-rooted deprivation in Wales over the past 15 years, with employment  
2403 deprivation, low access to services, and a poor physical environment (Welsh  
2404 Government, 2019).

2405 **4.2.3.2 Programme Participants.** To take part in the TACKLE programme,  
2406 teachers at each of the schools purposefully selected disengaged students according  
2407 to their overall score on the Vulnerability Assessment Profile (VAP) (Welsh  
2408 Government, 2014). The VAP is used to predict the likelihood that a student may  
2409 drop out of school, using the following criteria:

- 2410 • Attendance and unauthorised absences
- 2411 • Number of exclusions
- 2412 • Eligibility for free school meals
- 2413 • Reading age score
- 2414 • Assessment grades in core subject lessons (e.g., English and Maths)
- 2415 • Number of school changes within the last two years
- 2416 • Specific learning needs/requirements
- 2417 • Students in care/looked after status
- 2418 • English as an additional language

2419 Based on the above criteria, the VAP utilises a traffic light system, scoring  
2420 students as either red (score of 11 or higher), amber (score between 6 and 11), or  
2421 green (score below 6). Students identified as red or amber are considered at a  
2422 particularly high risk of school dropout and, if they were in year 10, were eligible to  
2423 take part in the TACKLE programme. Table 4.1 comprises the demographic  
2424 information of the thirty-eight students who took part in the programme.

2425 **Table 4.1**2426 *Demographic information of students*

Participant number	Pseudonym	Age	Gender
1	Hannah	14	F
2	Elliot	15	M
3	Rhys	14	M
4	Lewis	14	M
5	Lowri	14	F
6	James	14	M
7	Deion	14	M
8	Rhiannon	14	F
9	Amelia	14	F
10	Ryan	14	M
11	Jamie	14	M
12	Jordan	14	M
13	Sam	14	M
14	Jack	15	M
15	Owen	15	M
16	Dylan	14	M
17	Benjamin	14	M
18	Nathan	14	M
19	Adam	14	M
20	Bethany	14	F
21	Colton	14	M
22	Dominic	14	M
23	Carl	14	M
24	Samantha	14	F
25	Angharad	14	F
26	Megan	15	F
27	Charlotte	14	F
28	Erin	14	F
29	Marcus	14	M
30	Callum	15	M
31	Thomas	14	M
32	Emma	15	F
33	Charlie	15	M
34	Chloe	14	F
35	Faye	14	F
36	Sophie	14	F
37	Toby	14	M
38	Michael	15	M

2427 **4.2.4 The TACKLE Programme**

2428           The TACKLE programme was implemented over approximately six-months  
2429 in weekly two-hour sessions and comprised forty workshops in total. The programme  
2430 combined one-to-one mentoring, PYD classroom-based workshops and work-based  
2431 placements, and sport and physical activity to target disengaged students'  
2432 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes. The programme was delivered  
2433 by TACKLE facilitators who acted as students' mentors, classroom educators, and  
2434 sport and physical activity coaches. There were also additional facilitators including  
2435 professional athletes and work-based placement providers. However, TACKLE  
2436 facilitators were present throughout each modality and activity. Full details of the  
2437 programme are provided in Table 4.2.

2438 **Table 4.2**2439 *Overview of the TACKLE Programme*

<b>Modality and total number of sessions:</b>	<b>Aim of each modality:</b>	<b>Topics covered/Activities:</b>
Classroom Lessons: 12 sessions.	To enhance students' academic, social, and communication skills through access to activities, games, information, and learning materials which may provide students with essential perspective.	Coping with feelings and emotions, group work and team building challenges, establishing business ideas and sport clubs, organising events (e.g., primary school rugby festival), healthy eating and smoothie making, CV workshops, mock interviews, and professional rugby player talks.
Sport and Physical Activity: 12 sessions.	To develop physical and social competencies, knowledge, and transferable life skills (e.g., goal setting, emotional regulation, discipline, leadership, resilience, and work ethic).	Refereeing/officiating, designing, and delivering drills, working towards sport leader's qualification. Activities included: football, rugby, badminton, basketball, netball, bench ball, dodgeball, fitness/circuits, and inflatable rugby cage drills.
Work-Based Placements: 7 sessions.	To provide students with exposure to a diversity of occupations and help them to understand their options post-school.	Workshops included: construction, carpentry, painting and decorating, engineering, customer support team roles, ICT, technician roles, hospitality and catering, social media marketing, graphic designer, and police community support officer roles.
One-to-One Mentoring: 6 meetings.	To nurture the mentees overall personal development.	Focusing on employment/educational opportunities, school-related issues, and relationships with teachers, peers, and parents.
Rewards: 3 sessions.	To allow students to access and explore new opportunities, that otherwise may not be possible due to financial constraints.	Attending a rugby match and a tour of the Liberty stadium. At the end of the programme, students are provided with certificates and awards (e.g., ambassador awards) during a celebratory event delivered by professional rugby players, teachers, and TACKLE facilitators.

#### 2440 **4.2.5 Procedure**

2441 This research was classified as a service evaluation by Ospreys in the  
2442 Community and the University Ethics Committee, as such the programme did not  
2443 require ethical approval (Twycross & Shorten, 2014). However, ethical principles  
2444 and practices were followed to ensure the safety of participants. Specifically,  
2445 parental/guardian informed consent was gained for each of the students and student  
2446 assent was obtained to enable the data collected throughout the evaluation to be  
2447 utilised for research purposes. Any students who were selected to take part in  
2448 TACKLE by their school were able to participate in the programme, whether they  
2449 took part in the research evaluation or not. Students who were part of the TACKLE  
2450 programme were asked if they would like to be involved in the evaluation of the  
2451 programme and were provided with an explanation pertaining to how the information  
2452 would be used within a research context. Each student received a verbal and written  
2453 explanation of the evaluation study and an assent form to complete. They were also  
2454 provided with a parental consent form for completion. Out of thirty-eight students  
2455 who were enrolled on TACKLE, all agreed to take part in the programme evaluation  
2456 and provided parental consent and assent.

#### 2457 **4.2.6 Procedure: Realist Evaluation Design**

2458 As detailed in Chapter 3, the realist evaluation was conducted in three broad  
2459 phases.

2460 **4.2.6.1 Phase One: The Development of Initial Programme Theories.** To  
2461 develop initial programme theories, a review of the literature and informal  
2462 discussions with TACKLE facilitators were conducted. The initial programme  
2463 theories aimed to highlight how the TACKLE programme was expected to work and  
2464 included theorising different elements of contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes  
2465 (Jagosh et al., 2015; Pawson & Tilley, 2004).

2466 **4.2.6.1.1 A Review of the Literature.** The literature review focused on  
2467 defining and conceptualising disengaged young people, the engagement, behavioural,  
2468 and psychosocial challenges such young people encounter, and the four modalities of  
2469 the TACKLE programme: one-to-one mentoring, PYD programmes (classroom-  
2470 based learning and work-based placements), and sport and physical activity (see  
2471 Chapter 2). Based on the review of literature, the overall effectiveness of each  
2472 modality was summarised and an investigation of the characteristics of modalities  
2473 that facilitated or hindered overall effectiveness was conducted (i.e., important



2474 contextual factors and mechanisms). Through this process, I was able to understand  
2475 disengaged young peoples' context, the causal pathways explaining how and why  
2476 each programme may work, and the importance of combining each modality together  
2477 to cultivate positive engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes amongst  
2478 disengaged young people. Based on the literature review, I developed and refined  
2479 initial programme theories in collaboration with the TACKLE facilitators.

2480 **4.2.6.1.2 Informal Discussions with TACKLE facilitators.** The initial  
2481 programme theories developed through the literature review informed the informal  
2482 discussions with TACKLE facilitators. TACKLE facilitators comprised three  
2483 stakeholders responsible for developing and/or delivering the TACKLE programme.  
2484 The discussions focused on understanding stakeholders' justification for each  
2485 modality (i.e., mentoring, classroom-based learning, work-based placements, and  
2486 sport and physical activity), expectations regarding how each modality may interact  
2487 together, and the factors anticipated to impact programme delivery and outcomes.  
2488 Following this, I presented the initial programmes theories from the literature review  
2489 to TACKLE facilitators who provided modifications and refinements based on their  
2490 own insight and expertise. The literature review and informal discussions provided  
2491 complementary data that were used to finalise the initial programme theories.

2492 **4.2.6.2 Phase Two: Testing the Initial Programme Theories.** Phase two of  
2493 the realist evaluation utilised a combination of data collection methods to test,  
2494 scrutinise, and expand upon the initial programme theories in the three schools over a  
2495 six-month period. Specifically, participant observation, field notes, video footage,  
2496 pre- and post- questionnaires, and one-to-one interviews with students and teachers  
2497 were used.

2498 **4.2.6.2.1 Participant Observation and Field Notes.** I acted as a participant-  
2499 observer throughout the entire TACKLE programme and completed comprehensive  
2500 field notes. Being a participant-observer during a sixth-month period (three days  
2501 each week at the participating schools), enabled me to understand the context of each  
2502 school, to spend a considerable amount of time with the students; actively taking part  
2503 alongside them in each activity, observing and recording students' behaviours and  
2504 interactions, and engaging students in informal conversations (Bonner & Tolhurst,  
2505 2002). As an active participant in TACKLE, I was able to gain an understanding of  
2506 the students' lives, appreciate differences in their experiences of TACKLE, obtain  
2507 information outside of programme delivery (e.g., during breaks), and develop high-

2508 quality, trusting relationships with students (Patton, 2015). Comprehensive field  
2509 notes were completed during and shortly after the TACKLE programme. The field  
2510 notes comprised my initial reflections, thoughts, feelings, and emotional reactions,  
2511 descriptions of conversations and behaviours that had occurred, the setting in which  
2512 they had taken place, and the specific programme activities and content that day.

2513 **4.2.6.2.2 One-on-One Interviews.** Interviews were conducted with all thirty-  
2514 eight students and four teachers at the end of the programme. These teachers were  
2515 selected because they had regular contact with the students who participated in  
2516 TACKLE and were responsible for coordinating the TACKLE programme within  
2517 their school. The interviews ranged in length from 43 to 58 minutes ( $M = 49.4$  min,  
2518  $SD = 8.3$  min) and were conducted by me in a classroom setting. The interviews  
2519 comprised two phases. Initially they followed a semi-structured format comprising  
2520 open-ended questions to understand interviewees perceptions of the TACKLE  
2521 programme. During this, students were asked questions about their experiences of  
2522 each component of TACKLE, the overall impact (if any) of the programme, and  
2523 whether there had been any changes to their engagement, behavioural, and  
2524 psychosocial outcomes (see Appendix A). Teachers were asked to explain their  
2525 perceptions of the students' experiences of TACKLE, their own perspectives of the  
2526 programme, the delivery and implementation of the programme, and the impact (if  
2527 any) on students' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes (see  
2528 Appendix B).

2529 Following the initial phase of the interviews, the format transitioned into the  
2530 teacher-learner cycle as outlined in Chapter 3 (Manzano, 2016). Specifically, I began  
2531 by teaching students and teachers the theories behind each component of the  
2532 programme (e.g., TACKLE was supposed to help you practice presenting your ideas  
2533 to your peers, in a safe and trusting environment). Interviewees were then asked to  
2534 articulate their own interpretation (i.e., refining theories) of how each programme  
2535 component worked in practice. Encouragement and support were provided to  
2536 students through questions such as, "how did it work for you?" "do you think there is  
2537 something missing?" "sometimes that isn't working, do you know why sometimes  
2538 that doesn't happen?". Such realist interviews are an essential tool for unpacking the  
2539 causal nature of programmes and understanding important contexts, mechanisms,  
2540 and outcomes (Gilmore et al., 2019; Manzano, 2016). All interviews were recorded  
2541 on a dictaphone and transcribed verbatim.

2542           Recognising that disengaged students may find a one-to-one interview setting  
2543 challenging (Daley, 2013; Sime, 2008; Tilley & Taylor, 2018), I provided students  
2544 with a video of the TACKLE programme to watch as they discussed and reflected on  
2545 their experiences. Researcher produced observation videos have been shown to  
2546 create more meaningful and engaging discussion for students and have been  
2547 considered particularly powerful tools for engaging disengaged students in the  
2548 research process (Liebenberg, Ungar, & Theron, 2014). In the current study, the  
2549 videos shown captured the students' involvement over the six-month period and  
2550 comprised short clips of students taking part in the classroom workshops, work-  
2551 based placements, and the sport and physical activity sessions. The use of videos  
2552 helped to capture the diversity of modalities and the complexity of students'  
2553 experiences throughout the TACKLE programme (Tilley & Taylor, 2018).

2554           **4.2.6.2.3 Engagement Measure.** The Teacher Engagement Report Form  
2555 (TERF-N; Hart et al., 2011) was completed by teachers before and after the  
2556 TACKLE programme, to assess any changes in students' level of engagement during  
2557 academic lessons (i.e., English, Maths, Science). The TERF-N is a 10-item measure  
2558 examining emotional (students' feelings towards learning and their sense of  
2559 belonging and connection to the school environment), behavioural (active  
2560 involvement, participation, and conduct during academic and social activities), and  
2561 cognitive (students' beliefs and attitudes towards education and their psychological  
2562 investment towards their own development) aspects of engagement (Hart et al.,  
2563 2011; Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2014; Singh & Srivastava, 2014). The instrument  
2564 consisted of 10 items and utilised a Likert scale format of 1-5 (i.e., 1 = strongly  
2565 disagree and 5 = strongly agree). The TERF-N demonstrates good internal  
2566 consistency and reliability ( $\alpha = .83$ ) (Hart et al., 2011). Additionally, the correlations  
2567 for the items range from trivial ( $r = -.07$ ) to large ( $r = .87$ ). The majority of  
2568 correlations are significant (excluding item 6), and the average inter-item correlation  
2569 is moderate ( $r = .43$ ) (Hart et al., 2011).

2570           **4.2.6.2.4 Perceived Competence and Global Self-Worth.** To assess students'  
2571 scholastic, social, athletic, job competence, behavioural conduct, and global self-  
2572 worth, Harter's (2012) Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA) was  
2573 administered at the beginning and end of the programme. This instrument consists of  
2574 45 items and captures 9 various domains (i.e., Scholastic Competence, Social  
2575 Competence, Athletic Competence, Physical Appearance, Job Competence,

2576 Romantic Appeal, Behavioural Conduct, Close Friendship, and Global Self-Worth).  
2577 However, the scale was adapted for the current study to include only domains that  
2578 were deemed relevant for this specific population and purposes of the study.  
2579 Subsequently, the adapted scale consisted of 30 items and covered 6 domains in total  
2580 (i.e., Scholastic Competence, Social Competence, Athletic Competence, Job  
2581 Competence, Behavioural Conduct, and Global Self-Worth).

2582         The instrument utilised a 4-point structured alternative format. An example  
2583 item includes, “Some teenagers do things they know they shouldn’t do BUT Other  
2584 teenagers hardly ever do things they know they shouldn’t do”. Students are  
2585 encouraged to choose one statement that they consider a more accurate self-  
2586 description and then highlight whether that statement is “really true” or “sort of  
2587 true.” Each item is scored on a four-point Likert scale, where a score of 1 illustrates  
2588 the lowest perception of competence, and a score of 4 indicates the highest  
2589 perception of competence. The SPPA demonstrates good psychometric properties,  
2590 with internal consistency estimates for each domain ranging from 0.78 to 0.92  
2591 (Harter, 2012). The scale also demonstrates evidence of convergent validity when  
2592 compared to Marsh (1990) Self-Description Scale. For example, the SPPA Scholastic  
2593 domain correlates at .60 with the Total Academic domain, the Social Competence  
2594 domain correlates at .68 with the Peer Relations domain, and the Global Self-Worth  
2595 domain correlates .56 with the General Self-Concept domain (Harter, 2012).

2596         **4.2.6.3 Phase Three: CMO Configurations and Refined Programme**  
2597 **Theories.** The final phase involved realist analysis and interpretation of the data to  
2598 formulate context, mechanism, and outcome configurations and to refine programme  
2599 theories. Specifically, data were examined to understand the effects (outcomes) of  
2600 the TACKLE programme, the resources of the programme that led to effects  
2601 (mechanisms) and the type of circumstances in which these effects occurred  
2602 (contexts) (Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

2603         The data for each case study was analysed together to formulate CMO  
2604 configurations and programme theories that were similar across each school and to  
2605 examine instances where contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes were different  
2606 (Gilmore et al., 2019). One-to-one interviews were the predominant source for the  
2607 establishment of CMO configurations. Video footage and field notes from  
2608 observations assisted in the process of establishing CMO configurations. Although  
2609 the sample size of students was not sufficiently large enough to perform statistical

2610 analyses, pre- and post- questionnaires for each student provided pertinent insights  
2611 into changes in their engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes following  
2612 the programme. This information was subsequently used to help inform the  
2613 identification of the outcomes in the CMO configurations, helping to support or  
2614 expand the findings generated through the analysis of the qualitative data.

2615 **4.2.6.3.1 Data Analysis.** Interview transcripts and field notes were read  
2616 repeatedly, and the audio recordings were listened to multiple times. Throughout this  
2617 process, I immersed myself in the data while searching for instances where the  
2618 interviewees spoke about important contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes  
2619 (Mukumbang, Belle, Marchal, & Wky, 2016). The CMO heuristic was then applied  
2620 to the data and instances highlighting contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes were  
2621 coded. Specifically, to distinguish contexts from mechanisms, mechanisms were  
2622 separated into resources and reasoning (Dalkin et al., 2015). A table was formulated  
2623 listing the context, mechanism, and outcome configurations for each school and  
2624 direct quotes were linked that related specifically to each part of the CMO  
2625 configuration. Instances were explored where contextual factors differed across  
2626 schools and how this may have prevented the activation of mechanisms. I shared the  
2627 CMO configuration analysis with TACKLE facilitators and my supervisors who  
2628 provided feedback and input throughout each stage of the analytical process.

#### 2629 **4.2.7 Quality and Reporting Standards in Realist Evaluation**

2630 The realist evaluation was carried out in accordance with the RAMESES II  
2631 reporting (Wong et al., 2016) and quality standards (Greenhalgh et al., 2017). The  
2632 reporting standards were introduced to enhance the overall quality and rigour of  
2633 realist evaluations and comprise twenty items in total (Wong et al., 2016). Each item  
2634 has been followed during the course of data collection and analysis. The quality  
2635 standards highlight eight key principles: (a) a realist approach is suitable for the  
2636 overall purposes of the evaluation (see chapter 3, section 3.1); (b) principles of  
2637 generative causation are applied (see chapter 4, section 4.3); (c) there is an initial and  
2638 refined programme theory (see chapter 4, section 4.3); (d) the evaluation design is  
2639 explained and justified (see chapter 4, section 4.2); (e) data collection methods are  
2640 appropriate (see chapter 4, section 4.2); (f) appropriate selection of participants to  
2641 address research questions (see chapter 4, section 4.2); (g) data analysis is  
2642 retroductive and examines the interaction between context and mechanism(s) (see  
2643 chapter 4, section 4.2); and (h) realist analysis is utilised to construct CMO

2644 configurations and refine programme theories (see chapter 4, section 4.3)  
 2645 (Greenhalgh et al., 2017).

### 2646 **4.3 Findings**

2647           In the following section, the findings from the realist evaluation are presented  
 2648 under the eight initial programme theories (illustrated in boxes below). Evidence is  
 2649 provided pertaining to each initial programme theory. Specifically, under each initial  
 2650 programme theory description, there is a succinct summary of the initial programme  
 2651 theory and information regarding whether it was supported, expanded, refined, or  
 2652 refuted in light of the data collected. The findings related to each initial programme  
 2653 theory are then described according to the important contextual factors, mechanisms,  
 2654 and outcomes, which is followed by tables detailing the context, mechanism, and  
 2655 outcome (CMO) configurations. The CMO configurations are the output of the data  
 2656 collected and prolonged engagement and immersion within the field. Quotes from  
 2657 participants<sup>4</sup>, as well as field notes, are provided to illustrate each CMO. The refined  
 2658 programme theories are then discussed and summarised based on the data collected.  
 2659 Taken together, the CMO configurations and refined programme theories provide an  
 2660 explanation of how the TACKLE programme is or is not working, for whom, and  
 2661 under which circumstances.

#### 2662 **4.3.1 Initial Programme Theory 1: One-to-One Mentoring**

A mentor can listen, empathise, understand, and support the student, nurturing their overall personal development (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Reid, 2002). Through prolonged engagement, the student can develop trust and respect for their mentor, and the mentor can help the student recognise their strengths, assets, interests, and passion. Disengaged students may be unsure what they would like to do or hesitant to pursue their passion due to a lack of self-belief and direction. A mentor can provide a student with clarity and exposure to potential employment/educational opportunities, supporting them in the process of goal setting and planning (Reid, 2002).

2663           This initial programme theory refers to the impact of a one-to-one mentor.  
 2664 There was evidence to support many elements of this theory. For instance, the voices  
 2665 of students indicated that the mentor served as an effective source of support,  
 2666 providing an opportunity for students to feel listened to, understood, respected, and

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<sup>4</sup> Each student participant has been allocated a pseudonym; any quotes presented with a name are from interviews with students. When quotes are used from the teachers, they are explicitly labelled as teachers.

2667 valued. Over time, students developed trust and respect for their mentor, and the  
 2668 mentor provided clarity and guidance regarding employment opportunities for their  
 2669 future. These findings are explained in more detail below.

2670 **4.3.1.1 CMO Configuration 1.1: Development of Trust and Respect.**

2671 Students valued the high-quality relationships they developed with TACKLE  
 2672 facilitators, who served as their one-to-one mentors. These relationships were  
 2673 particularly important for these students because many of them described having  
 2674 negative and psychologically destructive relationships outside of the school  
 2675 environment (context). As Jack explained: “The one person I can’t rely upon is [my  
 2676 parent]. Just can’t speak to them about anything... [they] always lies to me all of the  
 2677 time.” Similarly, another student, Owen, stated: “my parents are quite literally  
 2678 examples of what I don’t want to become.”

2679 Within this context, the mentor served as a significant source of support, an  
 2680 opportunity for the student to feel listened to, respected, and valued (mechanism).  
 2681 Many students described how they experienced an immediate connection with their  
 2682 mentor (mechanism). For example, Angharad explained: “We got on right from the  
 2683 beginning, just kind of clicked.” For other students, although the connection with  
 2684 their mentor did not happen immediately, they explained how their relationship  
 2685 developed over time (mechanism). Dominic recalled:

2686 I’d say I was quiet for a while, like just kept myself to myself, I mean, didn’t  
 2687 really speak to [my mentor]. But after I got to know them properly, realised  
 2688 [my mentor’s] sound like and someone I can proper count on.

2689 Through prolonged engagement with their mentor, many went on to explain how  
 2690 much they enjoyed being around their mentor, and the feelings of mutual trust and  
 2691 respect they had developed for one another (outcome). As described by Sam: “[My  
 2692 mentor’s] got my back. I know I can trust them ‘cause they supports and respects me.  
 2693 And I enjoy being around them, makes me feel happy and calm.” Given the lack of  
 2694 quality relationships in their lives, the students indicated that they valued the  
 2695 authenticity of their mentors and being able to openly share their thoughts and  
 2696 feelings with them (outcome). According to the students, successful relationships  
 2697 were the ones where they felt comfortable sharing personal aspects of their life with  
 2698 their mentor. This sentiment was illustrated by Megan: “They’ve been someone I can  
 2699 rely on and talk to about anything. Things I haven’t even told anyone before.” This  
 2700 CMO configuration is detailed in Table 4.3.

2701 **Table 4.3**2702 *CMO Configuration 1.1: Development of Trust and Respect*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Students described having negative and psychologically destructive relationships outside of the school environment.	The mentor provided an opportunity for students to feel listened to, respected, and valued.	Many students described an immediate connection with their mentor, for others, the connection developed over time.	Students enjoyed being around their mentor and over time, there was a development of mutual trust and respect, and improved self-disclosure.

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**4.3.1.2 CMO Configuration 1.2: Guidance and Support.** According to the

data, it was evident that many students in TACKLE lacked positive role models and received limited access to information, support, and guidance (context). Throughout the one-to-one mentoring process, TACKLE facilitators provided access to new perspectives, advice, and guidance on aspects such as diet and exercise (mechanism), which may otherwise not be available to students outside of the educational context.

As Erin explained:

My parents aren't really bothered about me drinking or smoking, they smoke as well you see and they know most people my age smoke too so they're not that bothered, they'd prefer it if I didn't but they never say anything or get on my back about it.

By mentors providing such guidance and information to the students, this triggered a desire and motivation in students to adopt healthier behaviours (mechanism). In Hannah's case, for example, interactions with her mentor had helped her to realise the importance of looking after herself properly: Talking to [my mentor] just got me wanting to do more, taught me to take a lot more care of myself, and my health." As a consequence, the mentors were able to help direct students away from health-comprising behaviours and towards more informed health decisions (outcome). In Dylan's description of a discussion, he had shared with his mentor, he noted:

I've understood exercise and diet a lot more and it's giving me inspiration to me cause I used to eat just junk, and now I'm changing that, and eating more healthy food. So, it helped, [my mentor] taught me about how much calories you put in cause I've got to put in 2,500... and normally I probably put maybe over that, but now I'm putting in just a bit less, they're helping out



2728 with my shape as well you know, for my body, and turning me into a  
2729 different person.

2730 In a similar vein, Jordan commented:

2731 I'll be honest I'm eating a lot more healthy stuff now. I've been getting up  
2732 earlier to sort out breakfast every morning. I've had more like salad,  
2733 vegetables, I've even eaten more fruit. So, [my mentor] kind of taught me...  
2734 and helped [me] to stop drinking, I haven't had a Monsters energy drink in  
2735 three months. I used to have them [energy drinks] everyday mind.

2736 This CMO configuration is presented in Table 4.4.

2737 **Table 4.4**

2738 *CMO Configuration 1.2: Guidance and Support*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Many students in TACKLE lacked positive role models and received limited access to information, support, and guidance.	The mentor provided access to new perspectives, information, advice, and guidance on aspects such as diet and exercise.	This triggered a desire and motivation in students to adopt healthier behaviours.	Students were directed away from health comprising behaviours and towards more informed health decisions.

2739 **4.3.1.3 CMO Configuration: 1.3: Mechanisms of Awe.** The mentors were  
2740 extremely competent and knowledgeable about rugby. Many had extensive coaching  
2741 experience and had played rugby to a high standard (context). Through role  
2742 modelling and serving as supportive models of success, mentors discussed  
2743 employment opportunities and provided career-related guidance. During the  
2744 meetings, the students listened attentively to advice, it was evident that they looked  
2745 up to their mentors and were driven to emulate their mentor's achievements  
2746 (mechanism). Sophie, for instance, shared: "I was impressed by the coaching that  
2747 [my mentor] does, I'd like to do some coaching as well, with younger kids."

2748 Likewise, Colton described:

2749 I really want to do something just like the work [my mentor] does. Something  
2750 in sport and helping, just like what they do with us. So, teaching us sport and  
2751 coaching us, I'd like to do that with younger children, I think. I'd like to help  
2752 them play sport because I enjoy doing that, so I could do that all the time, as a  
2753 proper job I mean.

2754 Interactions with their mentors had positive outcomes for students, including the  
 2755 development of aspiration and ambition for their future (outcome). For instance,  
 2756 when asked to explain the impact of his mentor, Adam described how he had  
 2757 developed feelings of hope towards his future based on discussions with his mentor:

2758         Well, I know now that I wanna get my coaching qualifications. We [me and  
 2759         my mentor] talked about coaching a lot you see, and I realised that I'd really  
 2760         like to train the youngsters you see, at a good early age, five or six. And then  
 2761         train that team until their older and then hopefully I can arrange scouts to  
 2762         come down. So, it gives them all the chance to get into the professional  
 2763         [team].

2764 This CMO configuration is summarised in Table 4.5.

2765 **Table 4.5**

2766 *CMO Configuration 1.3: Mechanisms of Awe*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
TACKLE mentors were extremely competent and knowledgeable about rugby. Many had extensive coaching experience and had played rugby to a high standard.	Through role modelling, mentoring, and serving as supportive models of success, mentors discussed employment opportunities and provided career-related guidance.	Students listened attentively to advice. Many identified with and looked up to the mentors and felt driven to emulate their achievements.	Development of aspiration and ambition for their future.

2767         **4.3.1.4 Refined Programme Theory 1: One-to-One Mentoring.** In line  
 2768 with the initial programme theory, the data from this evaluation demonstrated that  
 2769 the mentor provided an opportunity for students to feel listened to, respected, and  
 2770 valued. Specifically, many students had negative, unstable, and psychologically  
 2771 destructive relationships outside of the school environment. In these conditions, it  
 2772 was evident that the student enjoyed being around their mentor and over time, they  
 2773 had developed a relationship based on mutual trust and respect. As a consequence,  
 2774 students felt comfortable sharing thoughts, feelings, and personal aspects of their life  
 2775 with their mentor. Furthermore, in the context of students who lacked positive role  
 2776 models and received limited access to information, support, and guidance, the mentor  
 2777 provided access to new perspectives, information, and advice on areas such as diet  
 2778 and exercise. Through engagement with their mentor, students were directed away

2779 from health comprising behaviours and towards more informed health decisions. In  
 2780 addition, within the context of mentors who had extensive coaching experience and  
 2781 knowledge, they served as supportive models of success and provided students with  
 2782 career-related guidance. The narratives of students indicated that they identified with,  
 2783 and looked up to their mentor and felt driven to emulate their mentor's achievements.  
 2784 This led to positive outcomes for students, including, feelings of aspiration and  
 2785 ambition for their future.

#### 2786 **4.3.2 Initial Programme Theory 2: Classroom-based Workshops**

These may enhance academic, social, and communication skills through access to activities, games, information, and learning materials, which may provide students with essential perspective and orientation (Pearson et al., 2015). Interactive classroom activities, discussions, role play scenarios, and small group presentation work may also enable students to practice articulating and presenting their ideas to their peers, in a safe and trusting environment. These are skills that, due to their educational experiences to date, disengaged students may find particularly challenging or threatening. Thus, having an opportunity to develop them in a safe environment is likely to be beneficial and important.

2787 This initial programme theory explores the type of learning opportunities  
 2788 students are presented with in the classroom setting. There was evidence to support  
 2789 this initial programme theory, particularly the emphasis on interactive classroom  
 2790 activities, discussions, role play scenarios, small group presentations, and the  
 2791 opportunity for students to practice articulating and presenting their ideas to their  
 2792 peers, in a safe and trusting environment. However, the classroom-based workshops  
 2793 also demonstrated different ways of working. These findings will be discussed  
 2794 below.

2795 **4.3.2.1 CMO Configuration 2.1: Active Forms of Learning.** Students in  
 2796 the programme described how during the classroom workshops, their voices and  
 2797 ideas were heard, something which they were not used to in their usual lessons  
 2798 (context). For instance, Faye shared: "In TACKLE I can speak my mind out, I can  
 2799 like talk about ideas and stuff that I'm thinking. In English, Sir tells me to keep my  
 2800 voice in." While Thomas further described: "You could put your ideas more through  
 2801 TACKLE than lessons, you can't really put your ideas through normal lessons  
 2802 because you get told off when you do it." In field notes, TACKLE facilitators were  
 2803 observed actively involving students in their own learning by enabling them to

2804 problem solve, delegate roles, share ideas, experiences, and perspective. As a  
2805 consequence, students experienced greater ownership and control over their learning  
2806 and higher levels of engagement and enjoyment (mechanism). This led to positive  
2807 outcomes for students, including improved social interactions and cooperation  
2808 between students', a sense of shared responsibility for their learning, and higher  
2809 levels of creativity and innovation.

2810           The students uniformly highlighted the importance of listening to each  
2811 other's ideas, perspectives, and interests in order to experience higher levels of  
2812 enjoyment towards learning and more control over the learning process  
2813 (mechanism). As James expressed:

2814           We're learning a lot from TACKLE, but you do it in a fun and enjoyable way  
2815 than normal lessons, like our group work, it was getting together everyone's  
2816 ideas and taking everyone's opinions and interests. Like when we created our  
2817 own business, that was spot on, fair play, I loved it. I know quite a lot about  
2818 having your own business, 'cause I watch podcasts of people who've got their  
2819 own [business], so, I could tell the others about it, I think them sort of tasks  
2820 give you more say, like you're kind of in control cause you have a say in all  
2821 the decisions.

2822 According to Deion, it was important for him to be actively involved through sharing  
2823 his own ideas to ensure he remained engaged (mechanism). He explained:

2824           In a normal lesson, it will be kind of like a, well, basically the teacher will be  
2825 up talking and then you just sit there and copy out of a book. Here [in  
2826 TACKLE] it's not like that, when you're talking in groups and working  
2827 together, you have more say and it makes you more focused, it's more  
2828 interesting, like you don't wanna read words and paragraphs all the time, you  
2829 wanna talk about your own sort of ideas.

2830 Emma also explained how working together in a group had helped her to interact  
2831 more effectively with her peers and developed her capacity to think more creatively  
2832 (outcome):

2833           I think you learn how to speak to everyone in your group properly because  
2834 you have to make sure everyone's happy with the decisions. It [group work]  
2835 sort of pushes you to think deep and teaches you to speak out your ideas in  
2836 something you've worked together to create.

2837 The narratives of students emphasised the importance of learning environments  
 2838 where they were actively involved, free to share their ideas, express their thoughts,  
 2839 think more creatively, work alongside others, and to take ownership over their own  
 2840 learning. This is depicted further in Table 4.6.

2841 **Table 4.6**

2842 *CMO Configuration 2.1: Active Forms of Learning*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
The education system is focused on standardised tests, rote learning, and accountability. Many students in the programme felt that in contrast to their curriculum subject lessons, they had opportunities for their voices and ideas to be heard within TACKLE.	During the classroom sessions, students were actively involved in their own learning through problem solving, distributing roles, sharing their own experiences and perspective, and expressing and exploring ideas and interests (e.g., establishing their own businesses, sports clubs, and events).	Students experienced greater ownership and control over their learning and higher levels of engagement and enjoyment.	Improved social interactions and cooperation between peers, shared responsibility for learning, and higher levels of creativity and innovation.

2843 **4.3.2.2 CMO Configuration 2.2: The Power of Collective Experience.** For  
 2844 several students, psychological challenges such as anxiety and panic attacks were  
 2845 common (context). Students described struggling with psychological challenges  
 2846 during their day-to-day school experiences. For instance, Ryan reflected on missing a  
 2847 considerable amount of secondary school previously:

2848 I struggled in year seven and eight because I had like bad school anxiety so I  
 2849 found it hard to go into school, so I was like they'd let me like, not home  
 2850 school but like I stayed off for like a good three months because in year  
 2851 seven, I just found it too hard in school but then both times I got in like a rut  
 2852 when I was in the house, not coming out, so, I decided to come back in.

2853 Feelings of anxiety, depression, and disconnection from school was a feeling shared  
 2854 by most students, likely due to their early exposure to life adversity and/or their  
 2855 chaotic and complex lives (context). As described by one teacher:

2856 I mean, I think there's so many contributory points here, you know, I mean,  
 2857 many have been moved from one house to another, for some, there's ten of  
 2858 them sharing one flat, there's erm, issues with dad, there's, you know, issues

2859 with partners, drugs, alcohol... There's so many kind of social and personal  
2860 issues here, there is drama in virtually every one of these kids' lives. School  
2861 is the closest they get to some normality. You know, these issues impact  
2862 hugely on their engagement and wellbeing you know, a real poor support  
2863 network.

2864 Throughout the classroom-based workshops, students constructed a more positive  
2865 self-identity (outcome) through the process of sharing similar experiences of  
2866 adversity and hardship with their peers (mechanism). For many students, discussing  
2867 past experiences helped students to develop an authentic understanding of each other,  
2868 while simultaneously processing complex emotions, thoughts, and feelings  
2869 (mechanism). As explained by Jamie:

2870 When [my parent] died, it made my anxiety and depression 'anging [very  
2871 bad], smoking helps though, it helps with panic attacks, makes them go  
2872 down. Little things really stress you when you're going through things. But  
2873 here, we get each other [in TACKLE], these boys', we've all been through  
2874 the same shit, we get it. Most [people] don't get us. But been in this group  
2875 with everyone, we can talk to each other and it's like I erm, I thought maybe I  
2876 can do this [school], maybe I can stick to it, you know.

2877 Rhiannon reiterated:

2878 There's a lot of things going through my mind and stuff. I can't really tackle  
2879 it on my own. The worse thing you can do about depression is nothing.  
2880 Isolating yourself really doesn't help. I have to have someone to help me and  
2881 I mean, after a while I did, I got comfortable in TACKLE speaking around  
2882 people about my problems a bit more. So, I took a lot off my chest and give  
2883 me confidence to talk to people, because I know how bad it is to feel, when  
2884 you can't talk to anyone and you've got a lot on your chest and shoulders. So,  
2885 it's important to be there for people around you and I've got more respect for  
2886 people now, because I've heard about what they go through, everyone is  
2887 fighting against their own demons.

2888 From listening to different experiences and understanding their peers' interpretation  
2889 of a shared phenomenon, students highlighted how they were able to understand and  
2890 make sense of past or present experiences in their own lives (mechanism). For  
2891 instance, Elliot revealed:

2892 I do make jokes about it [parental incarceration] 'cause it is what it is. I don't  
2893 like attention. But speaking to the boys did make me see that it's not my fault  
2894 though what happened. And that things happen that you can't control  
2895 sometimes.

2896 While Bethany shared a similar thought:

2897 It definitely boosted my confidence to talk to people about things, last year,  
2898 I'd keep most of it in. It's helped me a lot to just talk about things, I think I  
2899 understand more stuff now than I did. I used to be really quiet and shy... I  
2900 was just tucked like tucked away from everyone for a bit but now I'm coming  
2901 out of my shell a bit. I talk to my friends in TACKLE about stuff that has  
2902 happened to me. And I listen to them. I have a lot more respect for people  
2903 because I've seen what they go through. It's just easier to put yourself in their  
2904 shoes after you've seen it happen to someone else.

2905 As evident in the extracts above, through students sharing perspective and  
2906 experiences with their peers, they were able to develop personal relationships, social  
2907 connectedness, and an appreciation of one another's challenges (outcome). In the  
2908 case of Bethany, for example, she described how the TACKLE programme helped  
2909 her to develop feelings of empathy for those around her. When feelings of empathy  
2910 were triggered, Bethany was able to cope more effectively with her own  
2911 vulnerabilities and past experiences. As evidenced in the following quote:

2912 It made me realise that other people experience... they erm go through the  
2913 same sort of things and feelings. I suppose it kind of like made me think  
2914 differently and not be so hard on myself you know, like to stop worrying  
2915 about stuff, and like feeling so bad about things that have happened cause I'm  
2916 not the only one with problems here.

2917 This is explored further in Table 4.7.

2918 **Table 4.7**2919 *CMO Configuration 2.2: The Power of Collective Experience*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
<p>Many students had encountered adverse childhood experiences. Examples of such experiences included, but were not limited to, academic failure, peer bullying, emotional and physical abuse, neglect, parental separation, parental death, parental substance abuse, and parental criminality. As a result of exposure to such adversity, many students in TACKLE experienced psychological challenges.</p>	<p>During the classroom workshops, students shared perspective and similar experiences of adversity and hardship with their peers. Thus, the chance to share their own journey and to also hear their peers' journeys.</p>	<p>A feeling of being heard, a chance to understand aspects of their own lives and their peers' lives, the opportunity to process complex emotions, thoughts, and feelings, and to make meaning of their current or past experiences together.</p>	<p>Improved school attendance, relationships with peers, social connectedness, feelings of empathy towards others, and the construction of a more positive self-identity.</p>

2920 **4.3.2.3 CMO Configuration 2.3: Personal Growth and Development. In**

2921 the context of students who had encountered adverse childhood experiences, the  
 2922 classroom-based workshops provided students with an opportunity to receive  
 2923 encouragement and support from their peers, and established an environment where  
 2924 they could also share their own strengths, assets, and coping skills (mechanism). As  
 2925 highlighted by Charlotte: "Everyone was just so supportive, and I think like talking  
 2926 about myself, it made me see what I've overcome and the sort of things I've learnt  
 2927 about myself, you know, kind of like the ways I've coped with stuff." Outcomes  
 2928 evident included students developing feelings of self-esteem and self-worth and  
 2929 using their experiences of adversity to provide support to others facing similar  
 2930 challenges. For instance, Samantha explained:

2931 I understand other people because I've been through these things myself you  
 2932 see. So, I can help others get through them too. I'd say that's a good thing  
 2933 that's come out of all of this, now at least I can help others, help them to  
 2934 come through the other side.

2935 This CMO configuration is displayed in Table 4.8.



2936 **Table 4.8**2937 *CMO Configuration 2.3: Personal Growth and Development*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Many students had encountered adverse childhood experiences.	The TACKLE programme provided students with an opportunity to receive encouragement and support from their peers.	Students shared their own strengths, assets, and coping resources.	Improved self-esteem and self-worth. Students were motivated to use their own experiences to help others.

2938 **4.3.2.4 Refined Programme Theory 2: Classroom-Based Workshops.**

2939 There was evidence to support elements of the initial programme theory, however, it  
 2940 became clearer exactly how the classroom workshops were working and why. For  
 2941 instance, in the context of an education system where students experienced limited  
 2942 opportunity to express their voices and ideas, the classroom sessions worked when  
 2943 they created a student-centred learning environment in which students were actively  
 2944 involved in their own learning (Azzarito & Ennis, 2003; Bonnette et al., 2001).  
 2945 Through working cooperatively together in groups, problem solving, exploring new  
 2946 ideas, and developing new interests, students experienced greater ownership and  
 2947 control over their learning, and higher levels of creativity and innovation.  
 2948 Furthermore, the programme theory was also expanded, as the findings illuminated  
 2949 different ways in which the classroom sessions were working for students.  
 2950 Specifically, within the context of students who encountered psychological  
 2951 challenges (e.g., anxiety, panic attacks, depression), by bringing students together  
 2952 with similar challenges and backgrounds, they were able to share their experiences  
 2953 with their peers. This in turn enabled students to process difficult emotions and to  
 2954 make meaning of experiences together. As such, students developed feelings of  
 2955 empathy for their peers and constructed a more positive self-identity. In addition, the  
 2956 classroom-workshops also nurtured students' growth and development. For instance,  
 2957 as a result of the support and encouragement received by their peers, and the chance  
 2958 for students to share their own strengths and coping resources, students developed  
 2959 feelings of self-esteem and self-worth, and were motivated to use their own  
 2960 experiences of adversity to help others.

2961 **4.3.3 Initial Programme Theory 3: Work-Based Placements**

In order to re-ignite interest and engagement in education, students may benefit from exposure to more hands-on teaching approaches and practical experiences through work-based placements. Such experiences may help students to develop a vision for their future and offer clarity in relation to career options post-school. Work-based placements may also provide experiential learning opportunities which allow students to gain the skills, competencies, and behaviours necessary to secure employment in the future (Chen, 2011). Through interaction and engagement with supportive, knowledgeable adults, students may develop their perceived social and job competencies (Harter, 2012).

2962           This initial programme theory explores the idea that exposure to work-based  
2963 placements may re-ignite students' engagement in their education, helping them to  
2964 develop a vision for their future, and providing clarity regarding the opportunities  
2965 available post-school. In line with this initial programme theory, there was evidence  
2966 to support and confirm many elements, however, the theory was also expanded. For a  
2967 minority of students, the work-based placements triggered different mechanisms and  
2968 led to alternative outcomes.

2969           **4.3.3.1 CMO Configuration 3.1: Exploration of Possible Life Directions.**

2970 For many students, a summation of negative educational experiences had impacted  
2971 their desire and motivation to learn during core subject lessons (e.g., English,  
2972 Mathematics, and Science). Many had been referred to TACKLE due to displaying  
2973 disconnection and disaffection with current forms of learning and education. From  
2974 the data, it was evident that students lacked clarity regarding available options post-  
2975 school and were unaware of alternative learning strategies and pathways such as  
2976 vocational training schemes and apprenticeships (context). For instance, Marcus  
2977 observed: "Well there's loads of different apprenticeships and courses isn't there?  
2978 So, it was decent to see what you can actually do 'cause I didn't even know about  
2979 them [the apprenticeships and courses] I'll be honest."

2980           Successful experiences in the workplace triggered mechanisms of hope and  
2981 helped students to envisage possible life directions and a more desirable future.  
2982 Consequently, their engagement and attendance in classroom lessons was enhanced,  
2983 as they were able to make a meaningful connection between completing school and  
2984 future opportunities (outcome). As Lowri said: "Finding the things that I've found  
2985 out in TACKLE, all of the jobs I can do after school, changed the way I look at the

2986 [school] work and changed the way I thought because what I thought wasn't reality."  
2987 For the first time, many of the students could identify a reason for completing school.

2988         This increased engagement and attendance in school arose for various  
2989 reasons. For many students, the work-based placements enhanced perceptions of  
2990 competence and developed their awareness of their own knowledge, strengths, and  
2991 talents (mechanism). For example, reflecting on an engineering workshop, Lewis  
2992 indicated: "I like practical things, you know, I love learning from doing things. So,  
2993 my favourite part would be like knowing, finding out more about me. I've done stuff  
2994 [on these placements] that I didn't know I was even capable of doing." For Lewis,  
2995 building an awareness of his strengths and talents was a new experience and re-  
2996 ignited his engagement in classroom learning to enable him to pursue his interests  
2997 and talents post-school.

2998         The work-based placements also helped with the acquisition of new  
2999 knowledge, assets, and skills (mechanism), including strategies they may apply in the  
3000 future to establish an empowering and nurturing working environment. For instance,  
3001 James shared: "Because I want to have my own business, it [the work-based  
3002 placement] helped me to see how I could be an effective leader to my employees,  
3003 understanding them, their backgrounds, and the ways they work best." Consequently,  
3004 by recognising this, students' engagement in learning was re-ignited as they were  
3005 able to form a connection between school and their future. This CMO configuration  
3006 is depicted further in Table 4.9.

3007 **Table 4.9**3008 *CMO Configuration 3.1: Exploration of Possible Life Directions*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Many students in the programme felt disconnected towards learning. They had limited understanding of future prospects and were unaware of the opportunities available to them post-school.	Trips to various companies (either site tours or job shadowing) provided exposure to new possibilities for thinking about their future and enabled students to envision. This was accomplished through role play and allowing students to practice working.	The student felt comfortable in this new role after a few hours/days, they enjoyed their new role, and this experience opened up their thinking, enabling them to realise their own knowledge, strengths, and talents, while acquiring new knowledge, assets, and skills. The student realised that they were interested in a particular job that previously they had not been due to a lack of exposure. This triggered feelings of hope and re-ignited excitement towards education and their future.	Improved attendance, engagement, and behaviour in core subject lessons due to an enhanced motivation to achieve the GCSE grades necessary to be able to pursue such options.

3009 **4.3.3.2 CMO Configuration 3.2: Process of Elimination.** In contrast to the  
3010 students who developed a realisation of the occupations they were interested in  
3011 pursuing; a minority of students did not connect or resonate with the work-based  
3012 placements due to feelings of apathy towards the working environment.  
3013 Consequently, for some of these students, the work-based placements triggered  
3014 different mechanisms and outcomes.

3015 Specifically, prior to TACKLE these students were unaware of what  
3016 opportunities were available to them after school (context). As Amelia explained: “I  
3017 didn’t have no clue what sort of things I could do [after school] so, it [TACKLE]  
3018 helped me a lot seeing the different jobs that I can do and you know, trying them.”  
3019 Through immersing themselves in a diversity of work placements and experiences,  
3020 they were able to recognise the types of jobs they did not want to pursue  
3021 (mechanism) and subsequently, this realisation led to a desire to seek out different  
3022 occupations (outcome). As Carl described: “I found them [work-based placements]  
3023 boring, particularly ‘cause I know now that I wanna work on my own and do things  
3024 my own way, I wanna find something [a job] where I make the decisions.” Deion  
3025 concurred, he expressed:

3026 They [work-based placements] weren't really for me like but they did make  
 3027 me think about what route I wanna go down in life. Like when we went that  
 3028 massive company and seeing workers [customer support team] sat down at  
 3029 their desk and just answering phones all day long like and listening to  
 3030 everyone choping [complaining]. I really don't wanna do an office job mind,  
 3031 I'd go insane. So, I've been looking into other things I could do you know,  
 3032 like public services, military, and police... I'd need like good English, Maths  
 3033 grades, and proper good fitness levels mind.

3034 Clearly, for Deion and several other students, exposure to work-based placements  
 3035 helped them to eliminate the jobs they did not find appealing (outcome). The benefit  
 3036 of this process of elimination was also recognised by the teachers, as one described:

3037 It's not always about finding out what you like but sometimes you find out  
 3038 what you don't like, the sort of jobs you don't want to do. And then it's  
 3039 like... Well I've done that, it wasn't for me, move that to one side, and then  
 3040 move on isn't it?

3041 This is detailed in Table 4.10.

3042 **Table 4.10**

3043 *CMO Configuration 3.2: Process of Elimination*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Students were unaware of the opportunities available to them post-school.	Students receive exposure to various companies and work-based placement experiences. They realised that they did not feel a connection and decided not to pursue these occupations.	They started to direct their energy into thinking about what jobs they would like to pursue.	This led to students eliminating the jobs that did not resonate with them and instilled an interest and desire to seek out different opportunities.

3044 **4.3.3.3 CMO Configuration 3.3: Overcoming Anxiety and Fear.** For a  
 3045 small number of students, the work-based placements presented them with the  
 3046 challenge of unfamiliar people and a new environment, which activated mechanisms  
 3047 of fear, apprehension, and nervousness. I noted such feelings in my field notes,  
 3048 detailing that students stayed in close proximity to me at the start of the placement  
 3049 activities and explicitly expressed feelings of worry and panic towards new people  
 3050 and the new place. The opportunity to engage in work experience did, however, help

3051 students to overcome this anxiety and fear associated with entering into the unknown  
 3052 (outcome). Consequently, the work-based placements had another impact upon the  
 3053 students. For instance, a teacher described one of the student's level of anxiety:

3054           It was interesting that when I went down with them to the company, erm, I  
 3055           didn't think she'd [one of the students] come, right, because again it's taken  
 3056           her out of her comfort zone, and there were times when she was like 'oh my  
 3057           legs are wobbly and I feel, I feel the floor is shaking' And then you just, you  
 3058           know, you talked it through and then next thing, she's forgotten all about that  
 3059           and she's, you know, giving it all of this, she's flat out, saying well again, it's  
 3060           confidence and you know, losing that anxiety level, you know, of being in a  
 3061           new situation, a new environment.

3062 This CMO configuration is described in Table 4.11.

3063 **Table 4.11**

3064 *CMO Configuration 3.3: Overcoming Anxiety and Fear*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Many students experienced psychological challenges (e.g., anxiety, panic attacks, and depression).	The resource was new experience and unfamiliar people.	Students were confronted with feelings of anxiety and fear.	An opportunity to overcome anxiety and fear, and to complete the work-based placement.

3065           **4.3.3.4. Refined Programme Theory 3: Work-Based Placements.** In  
 3066 accordance with the initial programme theory, exposure to work-based placements  
 3067 re-ignited students' interest and engagement in their education. Specifically, in the  
 3068 context of students who had limited understanding of the opportunities available to  
 3069 them post-school, exposure to successful workplace experiences provided students  
 3070 with a vision of the occupations they would like to pursue and clarity regarding the  
 3071 options and pathways available to them. Through the placements, students developed  
 3072 a recognition of their own knowledge, strengths, and talents, while simultaneously  
 3073 acquiring new knowledge, assets, and skills. Such experiences re-ignited students'  
 3074 engagement in classroom-based learning in order to achieve the grades necessary to  
 3075 be able to access their chosen occupations. However, a minority of students did not  
 3076 connect with the work-based placements, but through exposure to occupations, they  
 3077 were able to eliminate the jobs that no longer appealed to them and began to seek out

3078 alternative opportunities. Furthermore, there was also evidence that in the context of  
 3079 students who experienced psychological challenges, exposure to work-based  
 3080 placements presented the resource of unfamiliar people and a new environment  
 3081 which triggered mechanisms of anxiety and fear. Through the placements, students  
 3082 were able to overcome feelings of anxiety and fear by successfully completing the  
 3083 work-based placement.

#### 3084 ***4.3.4 Initial Programme Theory 4: Sport and Physical Activity***

These activities may provide students with the opportunity to develop physical and social competencies, a sense of purpose, and transferable life skills (e.g., goal setting, emotional regulation, communication skills, discipline, leadership, resilience, work ethic) (Bailey, Hillman, Arent, & Petitpas, 2013; Gould, Carson, & Blanton, 2013; Super et al., 2018a). Sport is seen as a particularly valuable medium for the development of life skills as it is a highly charged emotional setting, offering unique learning experiences, and ‘opportunity structures’ in comparison to other modalities (Hansen et al., 2003; Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006). For instance, involvement in sport may provide a context for students to develop respect for their opponents, conformity to the rules, integrity, self-control, teamwork, and selflessness (Green, 2008).

If students are effectively taught life skills within the sport and physical activity context, then they may be able to effectively apply these skills across other areas of their lives (e.g., the school, family, and community context) (Gould & Carson, 2008). However, in order for life skills and developmental lessons learnt within sport settings to be internalised and transferred into other domains, facilitators need to reinforce the lessons learnt in a variety of ways (e.g., team discussions, modelling, and role play). Such activities should provide students with time to actively reflect and practice the life skills they are developing in sport within other domains (Bean & Forneris, 2017a; Gould & Carson, 2008; Whitley, Wright, & Gould, 2016). The successful transfer of life skills to other contexts may lead to improvements in student’s sense of coherence, engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes (Super et al., 2018a).

3085 This initial programme theory is grounded in the proposition that students can  
 3086 develop important life skills through sport and transfer these skills to other areas  
 3087 (e.g., the school, family, and community context) (Gould & Carson, 2008). The  
 3088 findings supported this theory to an extent. For instance, there was evidence to  
 3089 suggest that students developed leadership and communication skills through their  
 3090 participation in the sport workshops and that in turn, they were able to transfer these  
 3091 skills to their school contexts. However, it was evident that students developed life  
 3092 skills across all modalities of TACKLE (i.e., mentoring, classroom, and work-based

3093 placements) and that life skill development was not solely specific to the sport  
 3094 context (this is explored further in initial programme theory 6). Furthermore, the  
 3095 voices of students also highlighted that the sport workshops exposed them to new  
 3096 activities and opportunities. These findings are summarised below.

3097 **4.3.4.1 CMO Configuration 4.1: Position of Authority.** Many students  
 3098 involved in TACKLE were often disempowered. They were typically not trusted by  
 3099 teachers or significant others and were not provided with opportunities to lead or to  
 3100 take control (context). In this context, TACKLE facilitators spoke of the importance  
 3101 of offering students' leadership responsibilities and placing them in positions of  
 3102 authority. For instance, during the programme, students officiated rugby matches,  
 3103 festivals, and tournaments, and delivered sporting activities and drills to their peers.  
 3104 As a result of, all the students unanimously voiced increased feelings of competency,  
 3105 empowerment, and pride (mechanism). When describing his involvement in  
 3106 refereeing rugby for younger children, Benjamin said:

3107 In school, I'm usually sitting at the back like, trying to erm, trying to hide  
 3108 away from everyone. But on the field, it's kind of like I'm a different me. It's  
 3109 helping my confidence, I feel more happy in myself, like I can do a lot more  
 3110 things in life.

3111 Similarly, Nathan's description demonstrates the pride he had in his achievements  
 3112 (mechanism), particularly as they were highlighted by one of the TACKLE  
 3113 facilitators:

3114 I especially liked that, the primary school tournament because the second  
 3115 match I refereed I asked, has everyone touched the ball and two girls put their  
 3116 hands up, so, I put it, gave it them. And then the coach said... 'I'm proud of  
 3117 you so you can keep that whistle'. He gave me [the whistle], and I've still got  
 3118 it now.

3119 This led to students internalising feelings of competency, empowerment, and pride,  
 3120 continuing to search for more leadership responsibilities within the school, and  
 3121 establishing new ways of interacting with their teachers and peers (outcome). For  
 3122 instance, when discussing the impact of the sport workshops, Michael expressed:

3123 For me, it's improved sort of skills such as you know, confidence to do things  
 3124 and that. So, like I'm helping teachers run clubs in school. And that's quite a  
 3125 big, it's quite a big thing, helping teachers and that at my age. But after  
 3126 TACKLE, the teachers are trusting me with it you know, so, it's the



3127 confidence I've got, the speaking around people more, and helping out  
3128 others... is the key things I learnt.

3129 This is explored further in Table 4.12.

3130 **Table 4.12**

3131 *CMO configuration 4.1: Position of Authority*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Students involved in the TACKLE programme were often disempowered. They were typically not trusted by teachers or significant others and were not provided with opportunities to lead or to take control. There were power inequalities.	Students had the opportunity to deliver practical drills/activities to their peers and to referee rugby matches for younger age groups. This offered leadership responsibilities and opportunities for students to re-associate how they identified with themselves. As opposed to being at the back of the class that no teacher may usually listen to, they now had to directly lead, and were placed in a position of authority.	Students felt like a leader and had opportunities to experience what it felt like to be in a position of authority. They experienced feelings of competency, empowerment, and pride when the session was well received by their peers.	During TACKLE, students internalised feelings of competency, empowerment, and pride. They continued to search new leadership roles and volunteering opportunities within the school and established new ways of interacting with their teachers and peers.

3132 **4.3.4.2 CMO Configuration 4.2: Exposure to New Opportunities.** All of  
3133 the students in TACKLE lived in deprived and disadvantaged areas, with limited  
3134 access to facilities, transport, and sporting opportunities (context). As expressed by  
3135 Amelia: "I've never been to watch a rugby match at a stadium before. Where I live is  
3136 rough, there's no clubs or teams around me, just pubs and that." During the  
3137 programme, students participated in new sporting activities, attended professional  
3138 rugby matches, and experienced a stadium tour. For many students in TACKLE, they  
3139 expressed appreciation and gratitude for the opportunities provided (mechanism). As  
3140 Michael stated: "Well we got to learn and experience new sports. So, when we did  
3141 dodgeball, kick rugby, the rugby cage thing. And I was so happy we got the chance  
3142 to watch the [rugby] game at the stadium, that was class." Likewise, Nathan shared:  
3143 I haven't missed one single [TACKLE] session, and I haven't missed any  
3144 trips or lessons, even when I was ill. Remember when I was really ill, really  
3145 bad? But, because I didn't want to wreck the opportunity in coming to watch  
3146 a match and see the stadium, meet rugby players. So, this is better than

3147 everything in this school. I think this is the only reputation the school, this  
3148 school, has, I think, anyway. Because we do sports leadership, and we do  
3149 trips where nobody could ever do like with this school. They couldn't do it  
3150 their selves. Because it would be more expense, we would need to pay for it.  
3151 Like going into the stadium and changing rooms, I wouldn't have got to do  
3152 that if it wasn't for TACKLE.

3153 Echoing the voices of students, a teacher described the importance of these trips and  
3154 how meaningful they were to the students:

3155 Let's say, well from them [the students] never being able to experience a  
3156 game before, to then being able to not just watch a game but actually visit the  
3157 stadium, to see around the stadium, you know, they were so happy, to see the  
3158 changing rooms and the medic room. I don't think they expected it to be so  
3159 big or so posh, you know, the massive TVs in the changing room, the racing  
3160 seats. I think it gave them an insight into the level of professionalism in rugby  
3161 and well seeing all the different facilities, that was brilliant for them, it was a  
3162 huge thing for them.

3163 Unfortunately, however, it should be noted that one of the students in the programme  
3164 was unable to attend the rugby match due to perceived financial concerns. As one  
3165 teacher observed:

3166 He [one of the students] didn't go to the match, he was supposed to, but after  
3167 I spoke with him the next day privately, he never turned up because he was  
3168 worried that he would need money when he was at the stadium. You know, it  
3169 really does make you realise and bring perspective doesn't it? Makes you step  
3170 back and really appreciate the types of situations that these kids are facing,  
3171 you know, they come from families who really are struggling financially you  
3172 know, with very unfortunate backgrounds and leading such underprivileged  
3173 lives. I mean, many are providing for such large families. It's tough, their  
3174 lives are tough, and you really do feel for every one of them in TACKLE.

3175 For the majority of students, however, it was evident that the opportunities and  
3176 activities provided in TACKLE led to positive outcomes, including improved social  
3177 cohesion and connections with others. For example, in describing the impact of the  
3178 sports and activities, Thomas succinctly stated: "It like brought a lot of us closer  
3179 together. We experienced so much together and built good companionships and now  
3180 we can trust each other with lots of things." Another student, Angharad, described

3181 how her involvement in the different sports and trips had helped her to “make close  
3182 friends” and to “share experiences” with her peers, teachers, and the TACKLE  
3183 facilitators. This CMO configuration is explicated in Table 4.13.

3184 **Table 4.13**

3185 *CMO Configuration 4.2: Exposure to New Opportunities*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Students live in deprived and disadvantaged areas, with limited access to transport, facilities, and sporting opportunities.	The resource was providing access to new sports, transport, and sporting opportunities (e.g., stadium tours and free tickets to attend rugby matches with TACKLE facilitators and their teachers).	Feelings of appreciation and gratitude for the opportunities.	Social cohesion and opportunities to connect with others.

3186 **4.3.4.3 Refined Programme Theory 4: Sport and Physical Activity.**

3187 According to the data, consistent with the initial programme theory, there was  
3188 evidence to suggest that students developed leadership skills during the sport  
3189 workshops which they were then able to transfer to their school contexts. For  
3190 instance, in the context of students who were often disempowered and not provided  
3191 with opportunities to lead or to take control, the strategy of placing students in  
3192 positions of authority and providing them with leadership responsibilities led to  
3193 positive outcomes. That is, through students delivering activities to their peers and  
3194 refereeing rugby matches for younger children, they were able to re-associate how  
3195 they identified with themselves and experienced feelings of competency,  
3196 empowerment, and pride. As a consequence, students internalised feelings of  
3197 competency, empowerment, and pride and continued to search for new leadership  
3198 and volunteering roles within their school. These findings are congruent with  
3199 research on reference group theory (Merton, 1968), which suggests an individual’s  
3200 behaviour may be influenced by how they perceive they are being evaluated and  
3201 judged by the significant others around them. For instance, if TACKLE facilitators  
3202 and peers are able to see the students as leaders, then in turn, the student may be able  
3203 to see themselves as a leader.

3204 The programme theory was also expanded, the data revealed different ways  
3205 in which the sport workshops worked for students. For instance, regularly, TACKLE  
3206 provided opportunities for students to attend professional rugby matches, stadium

3207 tours, and to participate in new sporting activities. For many students in the  
 3208 programme, access to these types of opportunities would otherwise be limited, due to  
 3209 the cost of involvement and a lack of facilities and transportation. In this context,  
 3210 students expressed appreciation and gratitude for the opportunities provided.  
 3211 Through involvement in the activities, students had the opportunity to connect with  
 3212 others and social cohesion was facilitated.

#### 3213 ***4.3.5 Initial Programme Theory 5: Professional Athletes***

Given that rugby is the national sport in Wales and is linked to national identity, professional rugby players may provide a platform to inspire and motivate students (Armour & Duncombe, 2012). Through authentically sharing their own personal backgrounds, the challenges they encountered at school, successes and failures, and emphasising to students the importance of school completion, the rugby players may inspire students who are also facing similar challenges within school. Students in turn may internalise the messages received by the rugby players, changing the value they place on education, re-igniting an interest in their studies, and a desire to complete their GCSE examinations.

3214 This initial programme theory postulates that professional athletes may have  
 3215 potential to serve as powerful role models for students (Armour & Duncombe, 2012;  
 3216 Bricheno & Thornton, 2007). Specifically, through rugby players sharing their own  
 3217 educational journey and emphasising the importance of school completion, they may  
 3218 influence and shape students' perspectives regarding the value and importance they  
 3219 attach to education. From the data, there was evidence in support of this initial  
 3220 programme theory, however, in certain contexts for certain students this theory was  
 3221 not supported.

3222 **4.3.5.1 CMO Configuration 5.1: Connecting to the Struggles of Role**  
 3223 **Models.** Within TACKLE, the majority of the students displayed an interest in rugby  
 3224 and a passion for the sport (context). For instance, in response to being asked about  
 3225 their experiences with rugby, Rhys shared: "I've grew up with rugby mind, it's erm  
 3226 defo [definitely] my favourite sport, and well all my brothers love it too." Likewise,  
 3227 Jordan noted: "I play rugby outside school and in school, I reckon I've played since I  
 3228 was around 5, just going out on the field up by ours every night like." In this context,  
 3229 interactions with professional rugby players served as a powerful 'hook' for  
 3230 engaging their attention. Specifically, through listening to rugby players share their

3231 own narratives and personal deficits with education, students realised that somebody  
 3232 they admire has also faced similar academic and behavioural challenges  
 3233 (mechanism). For many students, the value they placed on education shifted listening  
 3234 to the rugby player explain how even professional athletes must navigate education  
 3235 and university, in order to have opportunities available post-rugby. Hearing this  
 3236 resulted in a number of the students experiencing a substantial shift in their attitudes  
 3237 and behaviour towards education (outcome). For instance, Emma explained:

3238 Like, I've never liked school but like now I know that I need to go. Because it  
 3239 is the start of everything, and I'll be honest before I didn't really care. Now,  
 3240 I'm like I need to go, otherwise, I'm just not gonna get a job later. Just like  
 3241 [the rugby player] said, I don't want to look back and regret not working you  
 3242 know, hard enough now. Like I have to prioritise my exams because I need  
 3243 GCSE's to do the things I want to do, you know. Even [the rugby player] is  
 3244 doing exams and that just, suppose well you know, it just tells you how  
 3245 important they are, I reckon.

3246 Similarly, Callum commented:

3247 I've understood education a lot more and it's not something to just mess  
 3248 around with, kind of thing. Especially after listening to [the rugby player] ...  
 3249 like this is what I could do next. And I'm not going to be in this school for the  
 3250 rest of my life, kind of thing.

3251 This is unpacked further in Table 4.14.

3252 **Table 4.14**

3253 *CMO Configuration 5.1: Connecting to the Struggles of Role Models*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Many students were interested in, and passionate about rugby.	Students listened to the athlete's narratives, their background, and schooling experiences. Specifically, athletes discussed the academic and behavioural difficulties they encountered during school and shared with students that they are currently completing qualifications alongside rugby.	A realisation amongst students that even athletes require qualifications to fall back on when their rugby career ends. Hearing this information from role models influenced students' perspectives as they realised that somebody, they look up to and admire has experienced similar academic/behavioural challenges and also needs to study in order to have career options and pathways available.	Changes in attitudes, behaviours, and the value students place on education. Enhanced motivation to complete school.

3254 **4.3.5.2 CMO Configuration 5.2: Lack of Connection.** In contexts where  
 3255 there was a distinct lack of interest in rugby, a minority of students were unable to  
 3256 connect with the rugby player nor internalise the important messages delivered due  
 3257 to a lack of admiration for the athlete and a failure to identify similarities between  
 3258 themselves and the athlete (mechanism). For example, when discussing the impact of  
 3259 the professional athlete, Marcus shared: “I’aint a big rugby fan so I don’t, like, well  
 3260 no like it didn’t change anything for me cause I’m not a rugby type of person and  
 3261 [I’m] not interested in rugby people.” Chloe’s experiences were similar, she  
 3262 succinctly explained: “I just like sat there. I don’t follow rugby; I didn’t even know  
 3263 who he [rugby player] was. I think someone different could be better, someone who  
 3264 does the same sport as me.” As a consequence, these students were disengaged and  
 3265 withdrawn during the workshops with the professional athletes (outcome). This  
 3266 CMO Configuration is presented in Table 4.15.

3267 **Table 4.15**

3268 *CMO Configuration: 5.2: Lack of Connection*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
A minority of students displayed a lack of interest in rugby.	Students listened to the athlete’s narratives, their background, and schooling experiences. Specifically, athletes discussed the academic and behavioural difficulties they encountered during school and shared with students that they are currently completing qualifications alongside rugby.	Students were unable to connect with the athlete or internalise the messages received due to a lack of admiration for the athlete and perceived dissimilarities between themselves and the athlete.	Disengagement and limited interaction during the workshops.

3269 **4.3.5.3 Refined Programme Theory 5: Professional Athletes.** In  
 3270 accordance with the initial programme theory, there was evidence to suggest that in  
 3271 the context of students who were interested in and passionate about rugby, the  
 3272 professional rugby players were influential in shaping their attitudes towards  
 3273 education and triggering a realisation of the importance of school completion.  
 3274 However, differences in contextual factors did exist. For instance, a minority of  
 3275 students displayed a distinct lack of interest in rugby. In such contexts, students were  
 3276 unable to connect with the athlete nor internalise the messages delivered due to a

3277 lack of admiration for the athlete along with a failure to identify similarities between  
3278 themselves and the athlete. These findings corroborate research on social learning  
3279 theory (Bandura, 1977), which suggests that in order for a student to actively listen,  
3280 engage, and internalise the messages received by a role model, the role model must  
3281 be considered important, desirable, and relevant to the student, and may need to  
3282 possess similar characteristics or attributes with which the student can identify  
3283 (Armour & Duncombe, 2012; Gibson, 2004; MacCallum & Beltman, 2002). Such  
3284 characteristics may comprise interests, attitudes, backgrounds, gender, age, an athlete  
3285 who has attended the same school, or those who have encountered the same  
3286 academic, emotional, and behavioural challenges either during school or within their  
3287 personal lives (Armour & Duncombe, 2012; MacCallum & Beltman, 2002).

3288 **4.3.6 Initial Programme Theory 6: The Importance of a Multi-Component**  
 3289 **Programme**

In order to re-ignite students' engagement and interest, a singular effort or approach may not be sufficient (Mawn et al., 2017; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012; Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019). To accommodate for each student's varied needs and interests, they may need to receive exposure to a mixture of programme modalities and resources (Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019). Through the introduction of a thoughtfully designed multi-component programme including one-to-one mentoring, classroom-based workshops, work-based placements, and sport/physical activity, students are provided with diverse options and pathways. As such, mechanisms may be triggered for different students at different time points and through different activities. For instance, a classroom session alone may not activate students' motivation, however, exposure to a work-based placement, which helps students to develop a vision for their future, may re-ignite classroom engagement in order to develop the necessary skills to pursue their chosen occupation. Thus, different modalities may complement others and work in synergy to enhance students' interest and engagement.

A multi-component programme may also provide students with the opportunity to receive many forms of feedback, affirmation, and support from different individuals (e.g., mentors, coaches, teachers, professional athletes, work-based placement providers). Feedback and support from multiple sources is particularly important for disengaged students because, due to an accumulation of negative experiences and adversity, students may have internalised perceptions of incompetence and inadequacy across many domains (e.g., education, workplace, sport, and social relationships) (Centre for Promise, 2014b; Harter, 2012; Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019). Thus, in order to change perceptions of competence that span multiple domains, disengaged students may need to receive repeated and consistent affirmation, and support from numerous sources.

3290 This initial programme theory refers to the importance of a multi-component  
 3291 programme. There was evidence to support this programme theory. For instance,  
 3292 each component of the TACKLE programme (i.e., mentoring, classroom-based  
 3293 workshops, work-based placements, and sport) complemented each other by  
 3294 providing students with a diversity of experiences, opportunities, and pathways.  
 3295 Through exposure to multiple components, the students indicated that their  
 3296 engagement in learning was re-ignited due to a realisation of their skills and interests,  
 3297 and subsequent motivation to pursue their interests and talents post-school.  
 3298 Furthermore, there was evidence to support the importance of disengaged students  
 3299 receiving affirmation, feedback, and support from multiple sources.



3300 **4.3.6.1 CMO Configuration 6.1: Exposure to a Diversity of Modalities.**

3301 Within the context of students who were disengaged and disconnected from school,  
3302 the multi-component programme provided students with exposure to a diversity of  
3303 modalities and resources. Through involvement in the various modalities, students  
3304 were provided with a range of new experiences, opportunities, and pathways  
3305 (mechanism). For instance, when asked to summarise the impact of the multipronged  
3306 approach, Faye responded: “Experiencing. You get the trips, the placements,  
3307 classroom, the practical’s [sport]. My favourite was the trips and classroom, but I  
3308 liked the fact that we did so many different things ‘cause I could see what’s out there  
3309 in the world.” Similarly, Ryan shared:

3310 Different because, I don’t know, it’s just, it’s different to anything I’ve ever  
3311 been [to] in school before. We got to do a range of things and they were, like,  
3312 different to what I’ve ever done before in school. It’s like, I’ve been taken out  
3313 [of lessons] for a few things now [programmes] but I, I think this [TACKLE]  
3314 has been the best one.

3315 As a result of exposure to various experiences and opportunities, students began to  
3316 look at themselves in a different way. Specifically, students developed a recognition  
3317 of their own skills and interests, while simultaneously developing new skills  
3318 throughout the different components (outcome). As stated by Callum:

3319 It [TACKLE] helped me realise my own skills. So, a lot of my skills came out  
3320 with the sport, the competitive games, and the erm, the teamwork classroom  
3321 sessions. I let people know how to do something, but I don’t tell them. I go  
3322 along with them and show them... ‘it would be best if you did this, did that’  
3323 and not ‘you need to do this, you need to do that’. It would be a rare occasion  
3324 I’d say something like that. So, that’s me being a leader, because leaders are  
3325 not on top, because no one can ever be on top. You have to help them [other  
3326 people] and that’s what I enjoyed, and I got better at how I, sort of speak to  
3327 people because of TACKLE I reckon.

3328 For many students, an awareness of their skills and interests, and the development of  
3329 new skills, re-ignited their engagement in learning and motivated them to complete  
3330 school in order to be able to pursue their interests (outcome). As explained by Ryan:  
3331 “I would say it’s made me more focused in lessons. Because I know what I want to  
3332 do and so, it’s just how to get there now isn’t it.” Similarly, Samantha shared:  
3333 “TACKLE has made me work harder [in school] cause it’s shown me what I wanna

3334 do and what I can achieve with my life.” This CMO configuration is detailed further  
3335 in Table 4.16.

3336 **Table 4.16**

3337 *CMO Configuration 6.1: Exposure to a Diversity of Modalities*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Many students in TACKLE were disengaged and disconnected from school.	The resource is exposure to a diversity of modalities (mentoring, classroom-based workshops, work-based placements, sport, and professional athletes).	Through involvement in the various modalities, students are provided with a range of new experiences, opportunities, and pathways.	Students started to look at themselves differently – they developed a recognition of their own skills and interests, while simultaneously developing new skills throughout the different components. This re-ignited their engagement in learning and led to enhanced motivation to complete school.

3338 **4.3.6.2 CMO Configuration 6.2: Access to Social Support.** In the context  
3339 of students who received limited support and guidance, the TACKLE programme  
3340 provided access to forms of emotional (e.g., care, trust, and safety), informational  
3341 (e.g., guidance and insight), appraisal (e.g., understanding of innate strengths and  
3342 capacity), and instrumental (e.g., access to resources, services, and work-based  
3343 placements) support from multiple sources and various role models (e.g., TACKLE  
3344 facilitators, professional athletes, work-based placement providers, and teachers).  
3345 Access to social support and exposure to a range of role models resulted in students  
3346 experiencing feelings of togetherness and connectedness (mechanism). As Amelia  
3347 indicated: “I think it’s just the support that’s been given by everyone. Because I had  
3348 people that were looking out for me and that I wasn’t on my own.” Echoing this  
3349 sentiment, Jack shared: “TACKLE was helping [me] get a better future and trying to  
3350 give us a good start in life. So, it makes me feel better cause there was people on my  
3351 side.” This led to positive outcomes for students, including, enhanced engagement  
3352 and behaviour in their lessons. As one teacher explained:

3353 The TACKLE project had a positive effect on many students’ attitude and  
3354 behaviour. You know, I noticed students’ taking part in lessons more,  
3355 contributing, you know, interacting with others more positively. Getting on

3356 with their work, staying out of trouble. I think a lot of them [students] didn't  
3357 want to let you lot down [TACKLE facilitators].

3358 This CMO configuration is summarised in Table 4.17.

3359 **Table 4.17**

3360 *CMO Configuration 6.2: Access to Social Support*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Students received limited support and guidance.	Students received forms of emotional (e.g., care, trust, and safety), informational (e.g., guidance and insight), appraisal (e.g., understanding of innate strengths and capacity), and instrumental (e.g., access to resources, services, and work-based placements) support from multiple sources and role models (e.g., TACKLE facilitators, professional athletes, work-based placement providers, and teachers).	Students experience a sense of togetherness and connectedness.	Enhanced engagement and behaviour in lessons.

3361 **4.3.6.3 Refined Programme Theory 6: The Importance of a Multi-**  
3362 **Component Programme.** There was evidence to support the programme theory.  
3363 Specifically, in the context of students who were disengaged and disconnected from  
3364 school, the multi-component programme provided access and exposure to a diversity  
3365 of experiences, opportunities, and pathways. Through exposure to different  
3366 experiences, students developed a recognition of their own skills and interests, while  
3367 simultaneously developing new skills. This led to positive outcomes for students,  
3368 including, enhanced engagement and interest in learning and education in order to  
3369 complete school and pursue their interests. Furthermore, in the context of students  
3370 who received limited support and guidance, the programme provided access to  
3371 emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental support from multiple sources  
3372 and exposed students to a range of positive role models. This led to students  
3373 experiencing feelings of togetherness and connectedness. Outcomes evident as a  
3374 result included improved engagement and behaviour in lessons. These findings are  
3375 congruent with research on social bonds theory (Hirschi, 1969), that highlights the  
3376 importance of connections and networks with significant others (e.g., peers, teachers,  
3377 adults) in order to prevent behaviour problems and to increase students' engagement,  
3378 motivation, and persistence.

3379 **4.3.7 Initial Programme Theory 7: The Ethos of TACKLE Facilitators**

Through facilitators caring for students, believing in them, and placing sensitive and customised high expectations (specific to each student’s contextual circumstances) on them, students may internalise these positive supportive messages coming from credible sources, realising their potential and the innate strengths, assets, and skills which they already possess (Jalala et al., 2020; Noddings, 2005). Thus, facilitators placing high expectations with the underlying mechanism of caring for and believing in students’ capabilities.

3380 This initial programme theory refers to the ethos and approach of the  
 3381 TACKLE facilitators. In correspondence with the theory, there was evidence to  
 3382 support the importance of facilitators caring for and believing in students’  
 3383 capabilities. However, the emphasis on facilitators placing appropriate, sensitive, and  
 3384 customised high expectations was not at the forefront of the data. Alternatively, the  
 3385 findings underlined the importance of facilitators implementing an ethic of care and  
 3386 endorsing a strengths-based orientation.

3387 **4.3.7.1 CMO Configuration 7.1: Caring and Responsiveness.** Due to the  
 3388 emphasis on assessments, testing, and accountability, many students in the  
 3389 programme described how, in contrast to the TACKLE facilitators, they did not feel  
 3390 that their teachers understood, cared for, or supported them (context). For instance,  
 3391 Dominic shared:

3392 TACKLE’s different to normal lessons and school in general, like, here [in  
 3393 TACKLE] I feel like people care and listen to me, like, actually ask if I’m  
 3394 alright and if there’s anything I want to talk about. Teachers never do that.  
 3395 Students explained that teachers were simply too busy focusing on assessments and  
 3396 testing to have the time to listen and respond to student’s needs. Sophie, for example,  
 3397 underscored: “They [teachers] “care” but they don’t. They just act like they do. But  
 3398 teachers are too busy to care for you. They’re really toxic.” Similarly, Lowri  
 3399 explained her feelings in the following way:

3400 All teachers care about is whether you’re gonna get them good results, but I’d  
 3401 say, that [in] TACKLE, I think it was more like well the environment, it’s  
 3402 more about, about you to be fair and how they can help you with anything.  
 3403 It was evident among students that there was a perceived lack of time for caring or  
 3404 pastoral roles within the school curriculum. In accordance with these views, a teacher

3405 highlighted the challenges of caring for students within the context of a performance  
3406 culture:

3407           It's a rigid setting [school], you know, I mean, you have a very strict regime  
3408           on curriculum, there's exam pressures, content to cover, targets to meet, and  
3409           you know, time constraints, and large class sizes, and unfortunately, there just  
3410           isn't the time to get to know each student properly or to build that sort of  
3411           relationship with every student in the class, you know.

3412 In contrast to the school environment, however, the students highlighted that they  
3413 believed TACKLE facilitators displayed genuine care and responsivity to their needs  
3414 (mechanism). This was accomplished by demonstrating an understanding of students  
3415 on a personal level and always being available to listen to them when needed  
3416 (mechanism). As indicated by Benjamin: "He [TACKLE facilitator] knows stuff  
3417 about me like, and so, he'll ask how stuff is and that, and like, that's tidy [great]  
3418 because it shows that he's bothered and [he] cares." While another student, Erin,  
3419 described how the TACKLE facilitators were always responsive and available:  
3420 "When I need to talk about anything then they like will always listen to what I have  
3421 to say." Similarly, observations revealed how TACKLE facilitators implemented  
3422 behaviours and strategies that aligned with an ethic of care. In my field notes, I  
3423 wrote:

3424           I have noticed they [TACKLE facilitators] never forget students' names (no  
3425           matter how many students' they work with!), and they see it as their  
3426           responsibility to get to know each student properly, including their  
3427           backgrounds, and their lives outside of the school context. But most  
3428           importantly, they make students feel important and valued by paying  
3429           attention to small details and being cognisant of all of the 'little things' about  
3430           students' such as, their interests, abilities, friendship groups, the sports they  
3431           play, the positions they play, the number of tries and goals they score each  
3432           week, the type of subjects they do and do not like, and even the names of  
3433           teachers they do not get on with.

3434 Outcomes evident included students demonstrating higher levels of engagement and  
3435 feeling valued and cared for within the TACKLE environment. This is depicted  
3436 further in Table 4.18.

3437 **Table 4.18**

3438 *CMO Configuration 7.1: Caring and Responsiveness*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Due to the emphasis on assessments, test scores, and accountability, there was limited time for caring or pastoral roles within the school curriculum. Many students in TACKLE did not perceive that their teachers understood, cared for, or supported them.	TACKLE facilitators displayed genuine care for students and responsivity to their needs. They had developed knowledge and an understanding of the students on a personal level and were available to listen to students when needed.	Students felt included, supported, and listened to.	Improved engagement, students feel valued and cared for in the TACKLE environment.

3439 **4.3.7.2 CMO Configuration 7.2: Strengths-Based Versus Deficit-Based**

3440 **Messaging.** Based on observations, informal discussions with teachers, and listening  
 3441 to many students speak at length about their teachers and the school environment, it  
 3442 was evident that a few teachers held deeply entrenched deficit ways of thinking about  
 3443 disengaged students (context). For instance, one teacher shared the perception that  
 3444 many students in TACKLE were unlikely to change their behaviour and attitude,  
 3445 regardless of the efforts and strategies implemented:

3446       It's their behaviour and attitude in general, you know, it's erm, impacting on  
 3447 their education. And It doesn't matter if we were to put some of these  
 3448 [students] on TACKLE, 5 days a week, you know, over 60 weeks. I think  
 3449 with many of them they will always revert back to that type.

3450 Similarly, in the following example from my field notes, I reflected on a  
 3451 conversation I had shared with a teacher:

3452       Today I walked with one of the teachers back to the classroom while  
 3453 speaking to them about students' employment aspirations. I was explaining to  
 3454 the teacher that one of the student's [in TACKLE] wanted to become a  
 3455 doctor, when the teacher suddenly looked at me and said "A doctor? Is that  
 3456 what he said? More like painting the walls of the doctor's surgery". I wasn't  
 3457 sure how to respond at the time, but I've been thinking about that moment  
 3458 ever since... If that's the mindset and belief system of a teacher then is it any  
 3459 wonder that some students may have internalised feelings of low self-esteem?  
 3460 If students are surrounded by a lack of support and self-limiting beliefs in  
 3461 their home AND school contexts... is it really that surprising that they don't

3462           feel they are enough? That they can't believe in themselves or trust their own  
3463           voice? That they choose to search for validation elsewhere?

3464   When teachers endorse a deficit-based approach (context), they may prevent the  
3465   TACKLE programme from acting optimally as students may have internalised a lack  
3466   of support, low self-worth, and feelings of failure (mechanism). For instance, Luke  
3467   acknowledged: "Teachers always make you feel you're not good enough you know,  
3468   like you don't even matter and you're not gonna achieve anything or go anywhere  
3469   with your life." Further, Charlie recounted a confrontation with his teacher that left  
3470   him feeling ridiculed and humiliated:

3471           Then when we came back after the summer holidays, we had about four  
3472           lessons, maybe five, and then after those lessons, we had a test and because I  
3473           didn't do really well and score on the easy marks, the teacher decided to erm,  
3474           remove me from the class. And he, because he phoned [my parent], [my  
3475           parent's] upset as well. He said I was illiterate and really other offensive  
3476           things. He expects things from other people that they can't do because I  
3477           remember we were doing a practical and he said what to do, and then he  
3478           expected everyone to do it correctly which is kind of difficult because we're  
3479           just learning.

3480   Although Charlie did not explicitly state the psychological effects of this encounter  
3481   during his interview, it had evidently shaken his self-esteem and it may have been a  
3482   reason why he took longer to settle into the TACKLE programme (field notes). For  
3483   other students, in the context of receiving negativity within their school environment,  
3484   they were particularly drawn to the TACKLE programmes resources and facilitators  
3485   (mechanism). Many described how TACKLE had helped them to identify and realise  
3486   their own strengths, capacity, and assets, while developing hope for their future  
3487   (outcome). Hannah, for example, shared:

3488           I like think more of myself before I just didn't think that I was good at  
3489           anything... I've realised that like there are things I can do when I finish  
3490           school, things I want to do and erm you know, things I'm actually pretty good  
3491           at, and it was TACKLE that helped me see that.

3492   Similarly, Charlotte stated:

3493           It's [TACKLE] just changed my life basically, I feel like I can do anything.  
3494           It's been amazing, it's been a once in a lifetime thing. It's actually done me  
3495           so well which I was really surprised about because I didn't think I'd change

3496 this much with the project, but I did, which is really surprising... It really has  
3497 boosted my confidence and made me believe in myself and my abilities.

3498 As a result of teachers observing the impact the TACKLE programme had on  
3499 students' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes, the programme  
3500 brought new resources of perspective and orientation to teachers (outcome). In  
3501 particular, teachers reflected on the importance of focusing on students' strengths  
3502 and capabilities. As one teacher described:

3503 The project really did just crack it you know, it really did show the  
3504 importance of the attentiveness to students, the encouragement, the praise, the  
3505 focus on their skills and abilities, helping students to see the types of things  
3506 they are capable of doing, and by the slow intervention, by the weekly you  
3507 know, intervention. If it wasn't for the TACKLE project, there's a side to  
3508 them boys and girls that I would never have seen otherwise.

3509 When teachers at the school shared the same ethos of the TACKLE programme and  
3510 endorsed a caring and strengths-based orientation, students may be particularly likely  
3511 to re-engage due to receiving affirmation and support from multiple sources. As  
3512 explained by Toby "I think it's just the support that's been giving by everyone, I  
3513 don't know where I'd be without TACKLE and some of the teachers here." Based on  
3514 all of the conducted interviews and prolonged observation, it was evident that  
3515 teachers who had a positive relationship with students were the ones who genuinely  
3516 cared for and wanted to work with disengaged students, and who also understood and  
3517 appreciated the challenges of such an endeavour. The following extract from one of  
3518 the teachers illustrates this:

3519 These students are difficult to work out. I say that to students a lot. I say I  
3520 haven't got a crystal ball. You have to tell me, you know, what you're  
3521 feeling, what you're thinking, why you're thinking it. With these students...  
3522 The group you see at the beginning are not the group you have at the end. To  
3523 see that development and it makes you appreciate you know, with some  
3524 students, it takes a long time, you know, and a certain type of approach.

3525 This CMO configuration is described in Table 4.19.



3526 **Table 4.19**3527 *CMO Configuration 7.2: Strengths-Based Versus Deficit-Based Messaging*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Students in the TACKLE programme received deficit-based messaging by teachers within their school.	The TACKLE programmes resources and facilitators endorsed a strengths-based approach.	While some students took longer to settle into the programme as they had internalised a lack of support, low self-worth, low self-esteem, and feelings of failure. Other students felt particularly drawn to TACKLEs resources and facilitators in the context of receiving negativity within their school environment.	Students were able to identify themselves with the strengths, capacities, and assets they already possess. Feelings of hope for their future.  For some teachers, the programme brought new resources of perspective, helping teachers to see the importance of endorsing a strengths-based orientation.

3528 **4.3.7.3 Refined Programme Theory 7: The Ethos of TACKLE**

3529 **facilitators.** The data collected from interviews, informal discussions, and  
3530 observations supported the importance of facilitators implementing an ethic of care  
3531 and endorsing a strengths-based orientation. Specifically, within the context of  
3532 accountability and high-stakes testing, there was a perception amongst students that  
3533 their teachers did not understand, support, or care for them. Comparatively, the  
3534 students' voices illustrated that a caring environment existed within the TACKLE  
3535 programme, whereby, the facilitators displayed genuine care and responsivity to their  
3536 needs. This was achieved by facilitators taking the time to develop an understanding  
3537 of students on a personal level and always being available to listen to students when  
3538 needed. As a consequence, students engagement increased and they described feeling  
3539 included, valued, and cared for within the TACKLE environment.

3540 In addition to the limited time for caring roles within the school curriculum,  
3541 interview data and observations of teachers' attitudes and behaviours towards  
3542 students confirmed that a number of teachers held deeply entrenched deficit ways of  
3543 thinking about students. In the context of receiving negativity within their school  
3544 environment, many students were particularly drawn to the strength-based resources  
3545 and facilitators of the TACKLE programme. For these students, the programme  
3546 helped them to identify and recognise their own strengths, assets, and capacities.  
3547 Other students, however, took longer to settle into the programme due to receiving  
3548 repeated deficit-based messaging and subsequently, internalising feelings of low self-

3549 esteem and self-worth. As such, if teachers at the school do not buy-in to the  
 3550 programme and do not share the strength-based ethos of TACKLE then this can  
 3551 prevent the resources of TACKLE from activating optimally. For some teachers,  
 3552 however, observing the positive impact TACKLE had on various student outcomes,  
 3553 triggered a realisation of the importance of adopting a strengths-based approach  
 3554 when working with disengaged students.

3555 ***4.3.8 Initial Programme Theory 8: The Behaviour Management Policy of the***  
 3556 ***Schools***

By preventing students from attending the TACKLE programme if they receive behaviour reports on the School Information Management System (i.e., behaviour management policy), students may be motivated to improve their behaviour and engagement within lessons out of a desire to be part of the TACKLE programme. The threat of taking away the programme may therefore lead to students changing their behaviour within core subject lessons and consequently, may serve as an effective behaviour management strategy (Skinner, 1953).

3557 This initial programme theory relates to the schools' behaviour policy. There  
 3558 was evidence to support the theory, for instance, for some students, the threat of  
 3559 removing access to the TACKLE programme did in turn, lead to improved behaviour  
 3560 and engagement during their core subject lessons. However, the theory was also  
 3561 expanded as other students did not adhere to the policy and it did not prove to be an  
 3562 effective strategy for everyone.

3563 **4.3.8.1 CMO Configuration 8.1: An Incentive to Improve Behaviour.** In  
 3564 the context of students who encountered less persistent and severe behaviour  
 3565 problems, the threat of taking away the TACKLE programme if students were to  
 3566 engage in any form of disruptive/challenging behaviour acted as a motivator to  
 3567 improve their behaviour, attendance, and engagement during core subject lessons in  
 3568 order to remain part of the programme (mechanism). For instance, many students  
 3569 described how they were committed to ensuring they did not receive any behaviour  
 3570 reports that would prevent them from attending TACKLE (mechanism). As  
 3571 expressed by Nathan:

3572 I've really tried to improve my behaviour to be fair, even Miss [teacher] said  
 3573 that. Because I knew that if I don't behave and keep winding people up then I  
 3574 won't be able to go [to TACKLE]. I used to always get sent to that [isolation]

3575 room cause of silly stuff really, just doing silly stuff all the time like, since  
3576 TACKLE I haven't been, ever since.

3577 The programme was an incentive to attend school as it was something students  
3578 looked forward to and wanted to be part of (mechanism). For example, Carl  
3579 explained:

3580 There's a lot of days that I just wouldn't come in [to school], my attendance  
3581 is shocking. I've missed like loads of lessons, there's so much to catch up on  
3582 for me like. Because of TACKLE though I think right I'll go in today, it's the  
3583 one thing I look forward to and enjoy in this school. So, I think well I might  
3584 as well go in [to school] then 'cause I'll be to go [to] TACKLE if I do.

3585 Outcomes observed as a result included a reduction in behaviour reports and  
3586 improvements in students' attendance and engagement during their curriculum  
3587 lessons (outcome). This is illustrated in Table 4.20.

3588 **Table 4.20**

3589 *CMO Configuration 8.1: An Incentive to Improve Behaviour*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Students encountered less persistent and severe behaviour problems.	Teachers prevented students from attending the TACKLE programme if they received behaviour reports (e.g., non-compliance, disruptions, violence, truancy, exclusions) on the School Information Management System (SIMS). As such, there is potentially no resource, it is the threat of removing exposure and access to the programme.	This policy acted as an incentive and motivator for students to improve their behaviour, attendance, and engagement in order to attend and remain part of the programme.	Reduction in behaviour reports (e.g., less disruptive behaviour and non-compliance) on SIMS, and improved attendance and engagement during curriculum lessons.

3590 **4.3.8.2 CMO Configuration 8.2: A Feeling of Being Denied.** Within the  
3591 context of students who encountered repeated and sustained behaviour incidents,  
3592 suspensions, and exclusions (context), removing access to the programme resulted in  
3593 frustration, a feeling of being denied, and higher levels of disaffection and anger  
3594 towards teachers and the education system (mechanism). As such, many students  
3595 described how they did not agree with this policy and the subsequent negative effect

3596 it had on their behaviour (outcome). For example, Owen shared: “When he [teacher]  
 3597 got up in my face and told me that I couldn’t go [to TACKLE], I kicked off and well  
 3598 everything’s just went really downhill in lessons since.” Likewise, Dominic  
 3599 conveyed his frustrations:

3600 That [behaviour policy] was just stupid, and it did my head in, like, telling me  
 3601 I can’t do something, like just made things worse cause they [teachers]  
 3602 always try to tell you what you can and can’t do. I hate this place. If  
 3603 something is good for you then why stop you from going?

3604 This CMO configuration is outlined in Table 4.21.

3605 **Table 4.21**

3606 *CMO Configuration 8.2: A Feeling of Being Denied*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Students encountered repeated and sustained behaviour incidents, suspensions, and exclusions.	Teachers prevented students from attending the programme if they received behaviour reports. As such, there is no resource, the teachers removed exposure and access to the TACKLE programme.	This led to frustration, a feeling of being denied, and higher levels of disaffection and anger towards teachers and the education system, replicating the experiences they encountered across other areas of their lives.	Exacerbated behaviour problems (e.g., conflict with teachers, truancy, and violence) and increased reports on SIMS.

3607 **4.3.8.3 Refined Programme Theory 8: The Behaviour Management**  
 3608 **Policy of the Schools.** Concurring with the initial programme theory, in contexts  
 3609 where students encountered less severe behaviour issues, they were more motivated  
 3610 and committed to improving their behaviour, attendance, and engagement to ensure  
 3611 that they would be allowed to attend the TACKLE programme. However, in the  
 3612 context of students who experienced repeated and protracted behaviour incidents,  
 3613 suspensions, and exclusions, the removal of the programme triggered frustration, a  
 3614 feeling of being denied, and disaffection and anger towards teachers and the  
 3615 education system. In such contexts, the behaviour policy exacerbated behaviour  
 3616 problems and reports.

3617 **4.4 Discussion: How did TACKLE work, for whom and under which**  
3618 **circumstances?**

3619 The aim of this realist evaluation was to examine how, why, for whom, and in  
3620 what contexts the TACKLE programme impacted (if at all) the engagement,  
3621 behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes of disengaged students aged 14-15 years.  
3622 The findings provided insight into the contextual conditions and mechanisms through  
3623 which the TACKLE programme led to desirable and undesirable engagement,  
3624 behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes among disengaged students. Specifically,  
3625 there was evidence from the data that supported, confirmed, and expanded many  
3626 elements of the initial programme theories. This section will discuss the findings of  
3627 the evaluation in relation to relevant literature, the implications for practice, and  
3628 recommendations for future research.

3629 Within TACKLE, students were more likely to engage in classroom-based  
3630 learning when they were actively involved in classroom activities, rather than  
3631 passively listening to the facilitator. Similar to the pedagogies implemented by Fang  
3632 and Ashley (2004) and Light and Wallian (2008), TACKLE established a learning  
3633 environment where students were at the centre of the learning process, working in  
3634 groups to construct their own ideas and knowledge, sharing and exchanging  
3635 information and experiences, delegating roles, socially interacting, problem solving,  
3636 and taking ownership and responsibility. Outcomes evident as a result of active  
3637 participation included students cooperating more effectively, higher levels of  
3638 creativity and innovation, and a sense of shared responsibility for their learning. Such  
3639 findings echo previous research (Azzarito & Ennis, 2003; Bonnette et al., 2001) and  
3640 supports the use of constructivist pedagogies for facilitating learning among  
3641 disengaged students. Constructivist pedagogies share the belief that students should  
3642 adopt an active role in their own learning and education (Shah, 2019; Thomson,  
3643 2012) and have been shown to empower and reinforce learning and to help students  
3644 find value in their education (Azzarito & Ennis, 2003; Dogru & Kalander, 2007;  
3645 Dochy, Segers, Bossche, & Gijbels, 2003).

3646 Conversely, behaviourist or teacher centred learning (i.e., the teacher is in full  
3647 control of knowledge dissemination and the direction of the lesson) provides limited  
3648 opportunity for student exploration, creativity, independent thinking, and social  
3649 interaction (Freire, 2000; Shah, 2019). Within such an approach, the student is  
3650 characterised as taking a passive role in the classroom environment, engaging in rote

3651 learning, repetition, and the memorisation of curriculum content (Ertmer & Newby,  
3652 2008). This type of approach may suppress students learning and can perpetuate  
3653 feelings of disaffection and disengagement (Shah, 2019; Stewart, 2012). From a  
3654 pedagogical perspective, the findings from this study suggest that if teachers and  
3655 facilitators structure lessons to allow opportunity for disengaged students to actively  
3656 participate, engage in group work, share their ideas and perspectives, and take  
3657 responsibility for their learning, students feelings of disaffection and disengagement  
3658 may be prevented. Thus, such findings support the commitment being made by  
3659 educators and scholars worldwide to integrate constructivist pedagogies within the  
3660 school curriculum (Shah, 2019; Thomson, 2012).

3661         The findings from this study indicate that disengaged students encounter a  
3662 number of psychological challenges including anxiety, panic attacks, and depression.  
3663 This is in accordance with previous literature which has documented the high  
3664 prevalence of psychological challenges amongst students at risk of school dropout  
3665 (Melkevik, Nilsen, Evensen, Reneflot, & Mykletun, 2016; Ramsdal et al., 2018;  
3666 Riglin et al., 2014). Many of the students involved in the TACKLE programme had  
3667 experienced exposure to early life adversity (e.g., parental criminality, parental  
3668 substance misuse, neglect, emotional, and physical abuse), which has been  
3669 consistently shown to have an enduring adverse effect on later psychological  
3670 outcomes (Kirlic et al., 2020; Larson et al., 2017; McLafferty et al., 2018; Slopen et  
3671 al., 2010). The formation of positive peer relationships during TACKLE provided  
3672 students with support and encouragement that promoted more effective coping  
3673 strategies and resources. In particular, corresponding with previous literature  
3674 (Douglas, Jackson, Woods, & Usher, 2019), through sharing adversity and  
3675 challenges with their peers, the participants were able to understand and make sense  
3676 of aspects of their lives, develop empathy and an appreciation of one another's  
3677 challenges, and re-shape how they seen their own individual experiences. These  
3678 findings are important as positive and supportive peer relationships have the potential  
3679 to compensate for neglectful, unstable, or harsh parenting and have been considered  
3680 a protective factor for disengaged students (Lansford, Criss, Pettit, Dodge, & Bates,  
3681 2003).

3682         Further, in line with social exchange theory (Homans, 1958), the benefits of  
3683 social support are believed to be reciprocal (McLafferty et al., 2018). For instance,  
3684 while receiving social support from peers is advantageous, providing social support

3685 and encouragement to peers may enhance psychological outcomes, by reducing  
3686 distress and the stress response (Eisenberger, 2013). Taken together, these findings  
3687 add to accumulating research that suggests programmes should provide opportunities  
3688 for students to interact and connect with their peers in order to develop and expand  
3689 social support networks, and to protect against the negative effect of early life  
3690 adversity (Douglas et al., 2019; McGrath & Noble, 2010; McLafferty et al., 2018).

3691 Due to similarities in life experiences, it has been suggested that disengaged  
3692 students may be more likely to identify and resonate with their peers (Topping,  
3693 1996). This was apparent in the current study which, corresponding with previous  
3694 studies (Abdi & Simbar, 2013; Douglas et al., 2019; Gilmer et al., 2012; James,  
3695 Smith, & Radford, 2014), clearly identified that informal peer-to-peer mentoring  
3696 strategies that arose between the students allowed them to feel empowered to make  
3697 positive changes and construct a more positive self-identity through the process of  
3698 supporting others. To date, most programmes have evaluated the impact of peers  
3699 providing support to younger peers (Douglas et al., 2019), however, the findings  
3700 from this evaluation extend the literature by revealing the potential for students of the  
3701 same age to positively impact one another. Prospective research is, however,  
3702 warranted to continue to understand the impact of same-age peer-to-peer mentoring.

3703 For students involved in the TACKLE programme, the education curriculum  
3704 was considered unresponsive to their diverse interests, skills, and abilities,  
3705 reinforcing their disengagement and marginalisation at school. Consistent with  
3706 previous literature, many of the students taking part in TACKLE particularly valued  
3707 the inclusion of work-based placements and more vocational learning opportunities  
3708 (Bloom, 2010; Hartas, 2011; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012). Such work-based  
3709 placements enabled many students to identify and recognise their innate strengths  
3710 and talents, while providing exposure to a diversity of occupations and potential  
3711 future pathways. The findings of this evaluation concur with previous research that  
3712 have proposed the re-structuring of the education curriculum in order to positively  
3713 respond to disengaged students' interests, needs, desires, and employment aspirations  
3714 (Callanan et al., 2009; Furlong et al., 2003; Hartas, 2011; Mizen, 2004). Although  
3715 the majority of students were identified as "disengaged" and "unwilling to learn" by  
3716 their teachers, the findings indicated that none of the students were entirely against  
3717 learning and education, but rather, the education system was failing to successfully  
3718 meet their needs. Specifically, these findings challenge the focus, structure, and

3719 organisation of the education curriculum, and underline the introduction of a broader  
3720 curriculum that incorporates work-based placements as a pre-condition for  
3721 disengaged students' engagement. By including both classroom and vocational  
3722 learning opportunities, in occupations of students' choice, engagement in classroom-  
3723 based learning was enhanced for many students due to increased clarity regarding  
3724 their future directions and subsequent motivation and incentive to achieve the grades  
3725 necessary to pursue such occupations.

3726         The TACKLE programme provided access to a number of adult relationships,  
3727 including mentors, TACKLE facilitators, professional athletes, teachers, and work-  
3728 based placement providers, which were considered critical to the success of the  
3729 programme. The students indicated that the relationships formed during TACKLE  
3730 had a positive impact on their psychosocial outcomes, self-worth, relationship skills,  
3731 and hopes for their future. Consistent with prior research (Ronkainen, Ryba, &  
3732 Selanne, 2019), during the process of identity formation, this study highlights the  
3733 importance of students receiving exposure to a diversity of support structures, role  
3734 models, and learning opportunities. Through exposure to role models and multiple  
3735 sources of support, students can experience a change in their own 'imagined' or  
3736 'possible' selves (Gibson, 2004; Markus & Nurius, 1986). However, one implication  
3737 of the findings from this study is that students may be more likely to be inspired by  
3738 role models and internalise the messages received, when there are similarities  
3739 between students and the role model in relation to interests, backgrounds, life  
3740 experience, gender, and age (Armour & Duncombe, 2012; MacCallum & Beltman,  
3741 2002; Ronkainen et al., 2019).

3742         In the context of low levels of family support and a lack of caring  
3743 experiences, the findings from this evaluation underscore the importance of the  
3744 caring, stable, and consistent relationships formed between students and the  
3745 TACKLE facilitators. In particular, students valued the authenticity of the facilitators  
3746 and how they listened and responded to their needs. The connection and bond formed  
3747 between students and the TACKLE facilitators were evident throughout the  
3748 interviews. For disengaged students, the importance of consistency, authenticity,  
3749 meaningful connections, and perceptions of closeness have been well documented in  
3750 the literature (DuBois & Neville, 1997; Freedman, 1988; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002;  
3751 Herrera et al., 2000; Parra et al., 2002). Caring relationships with at least one positive  
3752 adult role model have been identified as a critical protective factor that can help



3753 disengaged students negotiate difficult family circumstances, engage in academic  
3754 activities, improve their behaviour, and reduce the likelihood of school dropout  
3755 (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Jalala et al., 2020; Johnson, 1997; Perez, 2000).

3756           Unfortunately, however, students involved in TACKLE voiced discontent  
3757 with current school practices and the perceived absence of caring relationships with  
3758 their teachers. They attributed the lack of care to an educational culture focused  
3759 predominantly on academic attainment, testing, league tables, and accountability.  
3760 Such findings correspond to previous research that has highlighted the limited time  
3761 for caring and pastoral roles within an increasingly academically driven school  
3762 curriculum (Bintliff, 2016; Jamal et al., 2013; Noddings, 2005; Wellman, 2007).  
3763 Within the constraints of the school curriculum however, the findings from this study  
3764 reinforce the need to incorporate time for caring and pastoral roles when working  
3765 with disengaged students.

3766           In order to implement caring pedagogies, the results from the current study  
3767 are in accordance with prior research (Cooper & Miness, 2014), and posit the  
3768 importance of teachers and facilitators taking the time to develop an understanding of  
3769 students backgrounds and lives outside of the school context, engaging in one-to-one  
3770 interactions regularly, expressing an interest in students' hobbies and extra-curricular  
3771 activities, taking part in activities alongside students, praising their individual efforts,  
3772 progress, and achievements within and outside of the classroom, and being available  
3773 to authentically listen to students when needed. Such caring behaviours and gestures,  
3774 in turn, can establish a culture of care, whereby, students perceive they are cared for,  
3775 valued, and supported, and the overall teaching and learning experience is  
3776 subsequently, enhanced.

3777           TACKLE facilitators endorsing a strengths-based ethos was an important  
3778 overarching mechanism that enhanced the overall success of the programme. A  
3779 strengths-based ethos focuses on identifying and enhancing students' assets,  
3780 resources, potentialities, and innate capacity (Jalala et al., 2020; Maslow, 1954). The  
3781 emphasis on students' strengths and assets shifts away from traditional approaches to  
3782 re-engaging students that have predominantly adopted a deficit-based ethos; that is, a  
3783 focus on what is wrong with students, including, psychosocial challenges, deviant  
3784 behaviour, and risk factors (Hanrahan, 2017). For disengaged students, the explicit  
3785 recognition of strengths and opportunity for further strengths development and  
3786 exploration have been deemed particularly important, given that they may have

3787 fewer opportunities to realise their strengths within their school, home, and  
3788 community contexts (Super et al., 2019). A successful strategy used by TACKLE  
3789 facilitators to help students identify and express their innate strengths and attributes,  
3790 and to experience feelings of competence included placing students in positions of  
3791 authority and leadership (e.g., officiating and delivering sporting activities).

3792         These findings can be interpreted within reference group theory (Merton,  
3793 1968), which indicates that a student's behaviour may be influenced by how they  
3794 perceive they are being evaluated and judged by the significant others around them.  
3795 As such, if TACKLE facilitators and peers see the student as a leader, then in turn,  
3796 the student may internalise feelings of leadership and empowerment. Opportunities  
3797 for disengaged young people to engage in leadership roles and display competence  
3798 have been utilised in previous studies (Crabbe, 2009; Jones & Deutsch, 2011;  
3799 Martinek & Hellison, 2009; Whitley et al., 2016) and have been identified in the  
3800 literature as pivotal to cultivating favourable engagement, behavioural, and  
3801 psychosocial outcomes (Ungar & Teram, 2000). Collectively, the findings from the  
3802 study underscore the importance of facilitators identifying and recognising  
3803 disengaged students' strengths, assets, and capacities, and actively seeking out  
3804 opportunities for further strength development and exploration.

3805         In contexts where the school environment and teachers did not share the  
3806 strengths-based ethos of the TACKLE programme, the resources of TACKLE can be  
3807 prevented from activating optimally. In such instances, where students are receiving  
3808 deficit-based messaging from their teachers, they may be unable to internalise the  
3809 messages received by the TACKLE facilitators due to deeply entrenched perceptions  
3810 of low self-worth and inferiority. Many studies have demonstrated a direct link  
3811 between teachers' deficit-based thinking and their low expectations of students, on  
3812 student's self-esteem, belief in their own capabilities, academic attainment, and  
3813 school dropout (Rubie-Davies, 2006; Weinstein, 2002; Witte et al., 2013).  
3814 Programmes, such as TACKLE, may therefore be more effective at supporting  
3815 disengaged students when they are delivered in the context of a caring and strengths-  
3816 based school ethos, where teachers and the wider school environment share the aims,  
3817 objectives, and vision of the programme (Forneris, 2013; Quinlan et al., 2012). One  
3818 way to ensure that teachers support the programme may be through pre-delivery  
3819 consultation and teacher-training workshops that help teachers to understand the

3820 importance of adopting a strengths-based ethos and recognise ways in which they  
3821 can incorporate strengths-based approaches within their teaching.

#### 3822 ***4.4.1 Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions for Research***

3823           Previously, little attention has been directed towards the ways in which multi-  
3824 component programmes impact disengaged students' developmental outcomes. To  
3825 the best of my knowledge, this study is the first to use realist evaluation methodology  
3826 to address how and why a multi-component programme, including mentoring,  
3827 classroom learning, work placements, and sport led to changes in students'  
3828 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes. The realist evaluation allowed  
3829 for an exploration of the contextual setting of each school and student that facilitated  
3830 or hindered the mechanisms and observed outcomes of the programme. Collectively,  
3831 the findings from this study provide practical understanding and recommendations  
3832 regarding the architecture of programmes that can help advance the implementation  
3833 of future programmes working with disengaged students.

3834           A methodological contribution and innovative feature of this study was the  
3835 novel and engaging data collection methods used. Video-based interviews were a  
3836 valuable pedagogical tool that encouraged students to authentically express their  
3837 experiences and narratives in an interactive and engaging setting. This innovative  
3838 approach is particularly important given that disengaged students may find a one-to-  
3839 one interview setting challenging (Tilley & Taylor, 2018).

3840           There are, however, a number of limitations to this study that should be taken  
3841 into consideration. The TACKLE programme was implemented over the course of  
3842 six-months and was limited due to the strict school curriculum and the various school  
3843 holiday breaks during the delivery of the programme. Programmes delivered over a  
3844 sustained period of time may increase the likelihood of students' losing interest in the  
3845 programme and subsequently, increase attrition rates. Moreover, the six-month  
3846 period of delivery may be practically unfeasible within the school timeframe because  
3847 students are taken out of their curriculum lessons in order to attend the programme.  
3848 As a consequence, students can miss a considerable amount of instruction and  
3849 learning time. Thus, a concise and short-term TACKLE programme may be more  
3850 feasible. Additionally, the programme was implemented during late secondary school  
3851 (i.e., for students aged 14-15 years), however, earlier intervention may be critical to  
3852 reduce long-term adverse engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes for  
3853 disengaged students (Toth & Manly, 2019).

3854 My role as a participant observer and programme evaluator may also have  
3855 influenced the way in which the TACKLE programme worked, as well as the  
3856 outcomes generated. For instance, throughout my immersion and active participation  
3857 in TACKLE, I was able to gain an understanding of students' lives, appreciate  
3858 differences in their experiences of TACKLE, and develop high-quality, trusting  
3859 relationships with students. As such, it is possible that the interviews may have been  
3860 susceptible to socially desirable responses, in that, students and teachers may have  
3861 consciously or unconsciously presented themselves (or their students) in a favourable  
3862 way in attempt to avoid disapproval and/or to gain praise (Razavi, 2001).

3863 Students and teachers were only interviewed at one time point, following the  
3864 completion of the TACKLE programme, which did not allow for an examination of  
3865 changes in students' outcomes over time. This lack of longitudinal follow-up  
3866 measures is a limitation because it did not allow an understanding of the long-term  
3867 implications of multi-component programmes and enable a deeper understanding of  
3868 students' long-term engagement, behavioural, psychosocial outcomes, educational  
3869 and vocational trajectories. Prospective, longitudinal research is needed in order to  
3870 examine the potential mechanisms and important contexts of effectiveness of shorter  
3871 and continuous multi-component programmes.

#### 3872 **4.4.2 Conclusion**

3873 In summary, the current study expands the body of literature on effective  
3874 types of programmes with disengaged students by providing new insight into the  
3875 effectiveness of a multi-component programme (i.e., mentoring, classroom-based  
3876 learning, work-based placements, and sport and physical activity) to address the  
3877 varied needs, interests, and skills of disengaged students. The findings from the  
3878 evaluation suggested that each component of the TACKLE programme provided  
3879 students with diverse experiences, options, and pathways, and worked in synergy to  
3880 enhance students' interest and engagement. For instance, for some students, exposure  
3881 to a work-based placement enabled them to realise the occupations they were  
3882 particularly interested in and consequently, re-ignited engagement in classroom  
3883 learning in order to be able to pursue their chosen occupations. Furthermore,  
3884 throughout each component, students identified receiving forms of emotional (e.g.,  
3885 care, trust, and safety), informational (e.g., guidance and insight), appraisal (e.g.,  
3886 understanding of innate strengths and capacity), and instrumental (e.g., access to  
3887 resources, services, and work-based placements) support, which for some students

3888 was not available to them within and/or outside of the educational context  
3889 (Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019). Concurring with previous research, emotional,  
3890 informational, appraisal, and instrumental forms of social support were found to  
3891 positively impact disengaged students' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial  
3892 outcomes (Centre for Promise, 2014b). However, there is a need to examine the  
3893 long-term sustainability effects of multi-component programmes on students'  
3894 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes.

## Chapter 5: Study 2

### 3895 **5.1 Introduction**

3896 Chapter 4 (Study 1) consisted of a realist evaluation of the TACKLE  
3897 programme for disengaged students aged 14-15 years. The programme comprised  
3898 mentoring, classroom-learning, work-based placements, and sport and physical  
3899 activity, and was delivered over approximately six-months. Findings from Study 1  
3900 demonstrated how, why, for whom, and in which circumstances the TACKLE  
3901 programme impacted students' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial  
3902 outcomes. However, although the evaluation of the programme demonstrated some  
3903 positive outcomes, TACKLE occurred during the school day when students would  
3904 otherwise be attending their curriculum subject lessons. Thus, the students, who were  
3905 already struggling academically, missed schooling to attend the TACKLE  
3906 programme. Consequently, with the programme running over the course of six  
3907 months, it could result in the students missing out on a considerable amount of  
3908 academic activities and instruction time (Kirk et al., 2018).

3909 Moreover, due to delivery occurring over a six-month period, numerous  
3910 interruptions (e.g., school holiday breaks, staff illness etc.) occurred during the  
3911 delivery of the programme. Although no students dropped out of the TACKLE  
3912 programme, it is recognised that discontinuity in programmes with disengaged  
3913 students may lead to them losing interest in the programme and dropping out early  
3914 (Weisman & Gottfredson, 2001). As such, to minimise such interruptions and the  
3915 potential for dropout, as well as reduce the amount of time students missed from their  
3916 core schooling, it was deemed important to identify whether implementing a shorter,  
3917 more concise but continuous version of the TACKLE programme would be effective  
3918 in improving students' outcomes, while overcoming the limitations associated with  
3919 an extended delivery.

3920 Beyond evaluating whether a shorter version of TACKLE would be effective,  
3921 understanding if TACKLE may be effective with younger students than those in  
3922 Study 1 was also of interest. As indicated in Chapter 4, TACKLE appeared to be  
3923 effective with students aged 14-15 years, however, research indicates that it may be  
3924 beneficial to implement strategies or programmes earlier to reduce long-term adverse  
3925 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes for disengaged students  
3926 (Riglin et al., 2014; Toth & Manly, 2019). For instance, when programmes are  
3927 implemented during early secondary school (i.e., ages 11-13 years), students'

3928 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial functioning may be more malleable and  
3929 susceptible to effect change (Gracey & Kelly, 2010). Comparatively, there may be  
3930 more constraints on change during late secondary school as engagement,  
3931 behavioural, and psychosocial challenges may have expanded over time (Chase et  
3932 al., 2015; Lerner, 1984). As such, based on these findings, it may be that introducing  
3933 TACKLE at a younger age would be more beneficial, but this required examination.

3934 Finally, due to data collection concluding immediately following the  
3935 completion of TACKLE, the findings from Study 1 provided a limited understanding  
3936 of the long-term implications and sustainable effects of the TACKLE programme.  
3937 This lack of long-term understanding is a limitation that warrants addressing because  
3938 previous longitudinal research has indicated that the effects of programmes for  
3939 disengaged young people may diminish over time (Bloom, 2010). Thus, although the  
3940 findings of Study 1 indicated that TACKLE was effective, the extent to which any  
3941 changes remain is unknown. Moreover, previous realist evaluations have indicated  
3942 that mechanisms may take time to trigger, and thus the impact of these may not be  
3943 apparent immediately following a programme (Dalkin et al., 2015). Longitudinal  
3944 research, comprising data collection at multiple time points during and following  
3945 programmes for disengaged students, is important to identify the impact they have on  
3946 students' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes over time, and to  
3947 generate new insights that can inform policy makers and strategies aimed at  
3948 improving developmental outcomes in disengaged students (Callina et al., 2015).

3949 The present study aimed to address the three areas outlined above through a  
3950 realist evaluation with a longitudinal follow-up to examine the short and long-term  
3951 effects of a 10-week TACKLE programme on the engagement, behavioural, and  
3952 psychosocial outcomes of disengaged students aged 12-13 years. The specific  
3953 research questions addressed were:

- 3954 1. How, why, for whom, and in what contexts does a condensed version of  
3955 TACKLE impact (if at all) on students' engagement and behaviour?
- 3956 2. How, why, for whom, and in what contexts does a condensed version of  
3957 TACKLE impact (if at all) on students' psychosocial outcomes, including  
3958 academic, social, physical, behavioural conduct, and global self-worth?
- 3959 3. What are the underpinning mechanisms explaining the impact (if any) of a  
3960 condensed version of TACKLE?

3961 4. Does a condensed version of TACKLE have long-term sustainability effects on  
3962 students' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes?

## 3963 **5.2 Method**

### 3964 **5.2.1 Methodology**

3965 As with Study 1, due to the complex multi-component programme being  
3966 evaluated, a realist evaluation approach was deemed most appropriate. However, in  
3967 contrast to Study 1, a longitudinal follow-up was included to ensure evaluation of  
3968 both the short and long-term impact of the TACKLE programme on disengaged  
3969 students' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes could be measured.  
3970 As such, the realist evaluation approach aimed to understand how, why, for whom,  
3971 and in what contexts the TACKLE programme did or did not work in the short and  
3972 long-term at Llanfair School<sup>5</sup> in Wales (Pawson, 2013).

### 3973 **5.2.2 Study Design**

3974 This realist evaluation employed an in-depth, single, longitudinal case study  
3975 design (Yin, 2018); the case being Llanfair School. A single longitudinal case study  
3976 approach was adopted as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the TACKLE  
3977 programme and students' outcomes, at multiple time points, and in the real-world  
3978 context of a school (Crowe et al., 2011; Yin, 2009; 2018). As outlined for Study 1, a  
3979 case study approach was selected because it emphasises the centrality of context as  
3980 the backdrop for students' attitude, thoughts, and feelings, and seeks to establish  
3981 context-sensitive explanations regarding 'how' and 'why' programmes work (Yin,  
3982 2018).

3983 In examining how and why questions, such as 'how is the programme leading  
3984 to improvements in students' behaviour?' and 'why are students' disengaged during  
3985 the classroom workshops?' case studies utilise multiple methods of data collection in  
3986 order to refine theories and to develop a deep and rich understanding of complex  
3987 phenomena (Bishop, 2012; Crowe et al., 2011; Forrest-Lawrence, 2019). As such,  
3988 the characteristics of single case studies are methodologically compatible with realist  
3989 evaluation lines of inquiry (Williams, Burton, & Rycroft-Malone, 2012), and was  
3990 used as a platform to enhance theorising and to identify the contextual conditions,  
3991 causal mechanisms, and outcomes of the TACKLE programme (Gerring, 2007).

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<sup>5</sup> This is a pseudonym.



### 3992 **5.2.3 Setting**

3993 The programme took place at Llanfair School, a comprehensive secondary  
 3994 school, located in South Wales. Llanfair school has approximately 800 students,  
 3995 ranging in age from 11-16 years (Estyn, 2020). According to the latest Estyn  
 3996 inspection report (2020), Llanfair is situated in a low socio-economic area and has a  
 3997 significantly higher than average proportion of students eligible for free school  
 3998 meals. The school was identified as operating at a ‘good’ level across all inspection  
 3999 areas (Estyn, 2020). Drawing on data from the WIMD (Welsh Government, 2019),  
 4000 Llanfair school is located in an area of high employment, income, and health  
 4001 deprivation, with extremely low community safety.

4002 **5.2.3.1 Programme Participants.** In order to obtain information-rich cases  
 4003 (Patton, 2015), teachers purposively sampled students to take part in the programme  
 4004 based on the identification of characteristics associated with school dropout.  
 4005 Specifically, students were selected by their teachers if they had displayed two or  
 4006 more of the following set of indicators, as the interrelation of these indicators has  
 4007 been shown to significantly increase the likelihood of early school dropout  
 4008 (Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019):

- 4009 • Low academic attainment and grades
- 4010 • Behavioural challenges including disruption, inattentiveness, aggression, and  
 4011 truancy
- 4012 • Challenges related to poverty (sleep deprivation, hunger)
- 4013 • Housing instability
- 4014 • Limited family engagement and support
- 4015 • Caregiving responsibilities (taking care of younger siblings)
- 4016 • Negative relationships with teachers and peers
- 4017 • Psychosocial challenges including low self-esteem and low self-perceptions

4018 Additionally, students had to be in year 8 (aged 12-13 years). In total, twelve male  
 4019 students with a mean age of 12.6 years ( $SD = 0.9$ ) took part in the TACKLE  
 4020 programme.

### 4021 **5.2.4 The TACKLE Programme**

4022 As detailed previously, TACKLE is a multi-component programme designed  
 4023 by Ospreys in the Community for students at-risk of school dropout. The programme  
 4024 comprised one-to-one mentoring, PYD classroom-learning, and sport and physical

4025 activity. The programme is delivered by TACKLE facilitators who act as students’  
 4026 mentors, classroom educators, and sport and physical activity coaches. There are also  
 4027 additional facilitators, including professional athletes. Unlike the TACKLE  
 4028 programme implemented in Study 1, work-based placements were not included in  
 4029 this study due to the age and developmental stage of students. For this study,  
 4030 TACKLE included a weekly two-hour session that occurred every week for 10  
 4031 weeks during the summer term. Additional reward sessions (e.g., opportunities to  
 4032 attend professional rugby matches and stadium tours) took place on separate days  
 4033 and the mentoring meetings occurred after the sport and physical activity sessions.  
 4034 An overview of the TACKLE programme as it was delivered in this study is  
 4035 presented in Table 5.1.

4036 **Table 5.1**

4037 *Overview of the TACKLE Programme*

<b>Modality and number of sessions:</b>	<b>Aim of each modality:</b>	<b>Topics covered/Activities:</b>
Classroom Lessons: 10 sessions.	To enhance students’ academic, social, and communication skills through access to activities, games, information, and learning materials which may provide students with essential perspective.	Mathematics rugby-related challenges (e.g., co-ordinating a trip to Toulon, France to watch a professional rugby match), English challenges (e.g., establishing and designing their own sports club), sessions on leadership, respect, teamwork, group work and team building challenges, and a professional rugby player talk.
Sport and Physical Activity: 10 sessions.	To develop physical and social competencies, knowledge, and transferable life skills (e.g., goal setting, emotional regulation, discipline, leadership, resilience, and work ethic).	Refereeing/officiating, designing, and delivering drills, working towards sport leader’s qualification. Activities included: football, rugby, basketball, bench ball, dodgeball, fitness/circuits, teamwork challenges, and inflatable rugby cage and passing drills.
One-to-One Mentoring: 4 meetings.	To nurture the mentees overall personal development.	Focusing on school-related issues (e.g., behaviour and attendance) and relationships with teachers, peers, and parents/guardians.
Rewards: 3 sessions.	To allow students to access and explore new opportunities, that otherwise may not be possible due to financial constraints.	Attending a rugby match and a tour of the Liberty stadium. Certificates and ambassadors’ awards presentation delivered by TACKLE facilitators and teachers.

### 4038 **5.2.5 Procedure**

4039           The evaluation of the 10-week TACKLE programme was classified as a  
4040 service evaluation by Ospreys in the Community and the University Ethics  
4041 Committee, and consequently, ethical approval was not required. However, the study  
4042 was conducted in line with the ethical principles of informed consent and assent, and  
4043 the protection of students' anonymity and confidentiality. As such, all students were  
4044 invited to participate in the evaluation of the 10-week TACKLE programme and  
4045 received parental/guardian consent and assent forms. Students were informed that  
4046 their involvement in the research evaluation was voluntary and their decision to take  
4047 part in the evaluation would not influence their participation in the programme.  
4048 Completed informed parental/guardian consent and assent forms were received from  
4049 all twelve students, which enabled the data gathered throughout the 10-week period  
4050 to be utilised for research purposes. Ethical approval was granted from the  
4051 University's Ethics Committee (2018-067) for the longitudinal follow-up study. All  
4052 students received a verbal explanation of the follow-up study and a document folder  
4053 that comprised parental and student information sheets, consent, and assent forms.  
4054 Informed parental consent and student assent forms were completed for all twelve  
4055 students before they could take part in the longitudinal follow-up study.

### 4056 **5.2.6 Procedure: Realist Evaluation Design**

4057           The realist evaluation comprised the phases detailed in both Chapter 3 and 4,  
4058 and the longitudinal follow-up interviews.

4059           **5.2.6.1 Phase One: The Development of Initial Programme Theories.** The  
4060 initial programme theories were developed on the basis of the evidence and findings  
4061 from Study 1 (see Chapter 4) and the wider literature (Lipsey & Pollard, 1989;  
4062 Marchal, Dedzo, & Kegels, 2010; Marchal et al., 2012). Study 1 elucidated how the  
4063 TACKLE programme worked in practice for year 10 (aged 14-15 years) disengaged  
4064 students. Specifically, Study 1 described the outcomes of the programme, the  
4065 important contextual factors, and the underlying mechanisms. As such, the findings  
4066 from Study 1 and the wider literature were compiled to facilitate theory development  
4067 and to formulate initial programme theories that highlighted how the TACKLE  
4068 programme may work, in the context of disengaged year 8 students, and over what  
4069 duration.

4070           **5.2.6.2 Phase Two: Testing the Initial Programme Theories.** Using a  
4071 single case study design, the initial programme theories were tested, scrutinised, and

4072 expanded upon using participant observation, field notes, video footage, one-to-one  
4073 interviews, and pre- and post- questionnaires with disengaged students' and their  
4074 teachers over a ten-week period.

4075           **5.2.6.2.1 Participant Observation and Field Notes.** Consistent with Study 1,  
4076 throughout the 10-week TACKLE programme, I served as a participant observer and  
4077 made careful field notes during and after each activity and session. Observations of  
4078 students occurred in a variety of contexts; the classroom, sporting field, the  
4079 gymnasium, off-site trips (e.g., Liberty stadium tour), and during periods of informal  
4080 interaction (e.g., lunch breaks). During the participant observations, I was able to  
4081 actively participate in each activity and session, forming relationships and  
4082 attachments with students, offering praise and positive reinforcement, engaging in  
4083 informal conversations, and listening to students discuss their experiences and  
4084 perspectives of the TACKLE programme. Moreover, observations provided insight  
4085 into the wider school environment and the setting in which the TACKLE programme  
4086 was embedded (Patton, 2015).

4087           Through my immersion in the school setting, I had the opportunity to interact  
4088 with the school's head teacher, healthcare professional, and engagement officers.  
4089 This allowed me to see and understand things about the students that I otherwise may  
4090 not have discovered through my engagement with the programme alone. I left  
4091 conversations feeling overwhelmed and emotional due to the sheer complexities of  
4092 students' lives, their painful backgrounds, and current circumstances.  
4093 Simultaneously, however, I experienced feelings of awe as I witnessed how much  
4094 educators genuinely cared about their students and how invested they were in their  
4095 development and progress. As such, through my immersion in the field, I developed  
4096 an empathetic understanding of students' lives (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011) and  
4097 collected critical information that enabled me to form connections between important  
4098 contextual factors, mechanisms, and outcomes.

4099           Taking field notes is a widely accepted approach for documenting  
4100 observations and experiences (Helleso, Melby, & Hauge, 2015; Tjora, 2006). Field  
4101 notes can comprise the observers' own thoughts, emotions, and responses to  
4102 experiences (Wolcott, 2009) and should be recorded in situ where possible or  
4103 immediately after observational periods and/or experiences (Mulhall, 2003; Patton,  
4104 2015). Throughout the programme, detailed field notes were recorded during and  
4105 after each observational period, during informal discussions, and after interviews.

4106 They included elements of my own reflections, insights, and interpretations, context,  
4107 activities, students' interactions with the TACKLE facilitators and their peers, their  
4108 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes during activities, direct  
4109 quotations, and students' decision-making, leadership, and conflict resolution skills.

4110 **5.2.6.2.2 One-on-One Interviews.** Interviews were conducted with twelve  
4111 students and two teachers at the end of the programme. They ranged in length from  
4112 eight to fifty minutes ( $M = 37.1$ ,  $SD = 18.8$ ). The interviews with students took the  
4113 form of 'walking interviews' in that, a student and I would talk while walking around  
4114 school facilities together (King & Woodroffe, 2019). Specifically, we walked around  
4115 the school yard, field, and gymnasium (where TACKLE had taken place). The  
4116 interviews with teachers were conducted on the school field during regular school  
4117 hours and by telephone at a time suitable for them.

4118 The walking interview approach was adopted as this method provided an  
4119 innovative opportunity to generate richer information from disengaged students  
4120 regarding their experiences of the TACKLE programme (Botfield, Zwi, Lenette, &  
4121 Newman, 2019; King & Woodroffe, 2019). Previous studies utilising walking  
4122 interviews or the 'talk-as-you-walk' method with vulnerable populations have  
4123 provided insight into both the value and success of the approach (Botfield et al.,  
4124 2019; O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010; Ross, Renold, Holland, & Hillman 2009). Walking  
4125 interviews allow for more flexible and free flowing conversation that can help  
4126 students to feel comfortable articulating their perspective and experiences at their  
4127 own pace (Botfield et al., 2019; Ross et al., 2009). The more informal style of  
4128 walking interviews may also challenge the power imbalance inherent in the  
4129 traditional adult-to-young person relationship and subsequently, students may be  
4130 more likely to provide honest answers rather than attempting to search for the  
4131 'correct' answers (Evans & Jones, 2011). As such, walking interviews were used as  
4132 they provided the students involved a space to share their personal experiences in a  
4133 more natural and authentic environment, compared to the one-to-one sedentary  
4134 interview setting (Evans & Jones, 2011; Ross et al., 2009).

4135 Interview topics explored contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes, based on the  
4136 perceptions of students and teachers. Initial questions followed a semi-structured  
4137 interview guide, as this allowed for flexibility in the discussion and created an  
4138 opportunity for students and teachers to provide new meanings and perspectives  
4139 (Galletta, 2013). Open-ended questions were asked to elicit students experiences of,

4140 and views on, the TACKLE programme, covering activities and modalities, the  
4141 meaning of the programme to students and the relationships established, and the  
4142 overall impact (if any) of TACKLE on students' engagement, behavioural, and  
4143 psychosocial outcomes. Teachers were asked to reflect on the programme, to explain  
4144 how the programme did or did not work, the perceived impact (if any) of the  
4145 programme, the facilitators and constraints of the programme, and perceived changes  
4146 in students' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes.

4147 Interview questions then progressed into the realist teacher-learner cycle as  
4148 outlined in Chapter 3 (Manzano, 2016). During this phase, questions were informed  
4149 by the initial programme theories. Examples of questions posed included: "TACKLE  
4150 was supposed to help you develop leadership and teamwork skills, how did  
4151 TACKLE work for you?" "TACKLE gave you the chance to be in control and to  
4152 make decisions, how did you find this type of approach?" "TACKLE works  
4153 differently for different students; how did the programme work for you?".  
4154 Interviewees were then asked to share their own interpretations and experiences of  
4155 the programme (i.e., refining programme theories). With the permission of students  
4156 and teachers, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

4157 **5.2.6.2.3 Follow-up interviews.** Follow-up interviews were conducted with  
4158 students and teachers at three points in time; October 2018, January 2019, and May  
4159 2019. Altogether, twelve students' and two teachers participated in the first  
4160 interviews, ten students' and two teachers in the second interviews, and ten students'  
4161 and one teacher in the final interviews ( $n = 37$ ). Unfortunately, two students dropped  
4162 out of the longitudinal follow-up at the second time point (January) because of  
4163 family circumstances and subsequent school changes due to re-location. Interviews  
4164 ranged in duration from seven to fifty-four minutes ( $M = 38.9$ ,  $SD = 20.3$ ).

4165 Walking interviews (King & Woodroffe, 2019) were again used with students  
4166 to explore their engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes at multiple  
4167 time points. The semi-structured interview guides were tailored specifically to each  
4168 student and employed a conversational tone, including questions around their  
4169 interests, hobbies, friendship groups, and their educational and employment  
4170 aspirations. Students were encouraged to describe their feelings and attitudes towards  
4171 learning, their concentration, involvement, and behaviour during core subject lessons  
4172 (e.g., English, Mathematics, and Science), their school attendance, relationships and  
4173 interactions with teachers and peers, and their perceptions of confidence and

4174 competence. During the walking interviews, students were also prompted to reflect  
4175 on the overall impact of the TACKLE programme, and whether they perceived the  
4176 programme had led to any long-term changes in their engagement, behavioural, and  
4177 psychosocial outcomes. The interviews with teachers were conducted in a classroom  
4178 setting and explored teachers' views regarding their students' progress, focusing on  
4179 important contextual factors, and their perceptions of students' engagement,  
4180 behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes over time. Each interview was audio  
4181 recorded and transcribed verbatim.

4182           **5.2.6.2.4 Engagement Measure.** Replicating Study 1, engagement was  
4183 measured using the TERF-N (Hart et al., 2011), which was completed by teachers  
4184 before and after the programme.

4185           **5.2.6.2.5 Perceived Competence and Global Self-Worth.** As with Study 1,  
4186 students' perceptions of their scholastic, social, athletic, behavioural conduct, and  
4187 global self-worth were assessed through the SPPA at the beginning and end of the  
4188 programme (Harter, 2012). Job competence was not measured in this study due to the  
4189 absence of work-based placements.

4190           **5.2.6.3 Phase Three: CMO Configurations and Refined Programme**  
4191 **Theories.** The third phase involved realist analysis and synthesis of the data in order  
4192 to formulate CMO configurations and to refine programme theories. Specifically,  
4193 data were examined to explain how the TACKLE programme led to specific  
4194 outcomes, under which contexts, and through which causal mechanisms (Marchal et  
4195 al., 2010). The interview transcripts were the predominant source for the  
4196 establishment of CMO configurations, particularly for assessing long-term impacts.  
4197 Observations, field notes, and video footage assisted in the process of formulating  
4198 CMO configurations. Pre- and-post questionnaires for each student provided  
4199 pertinent insights into changes in their engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial  
4200 outcomes at the beginning and end of the programme. This information was used to  
4201 inform the outcomes of the CMO configurations, helping to support, confirm, or  
4202 expand the findings generated through the analysis of the qualitative data.

4203           **5.2.6.3.1 Data Analysis.** All data were analysed following the same process  
4204 as that adopted in Study 1. Specifically, interview transcripts and field notes were  
4205 read several times in their entirety, and each audio recording was listened to  
4206 repeatedly. Interview transcripts and field notes were then examined one at a time,  
4207 and the CMO heuristic was applied to code relevant contexts, mechanisms (separated

4208 into resources and reasoning), and outcomes (Dalkin et al., 2015; Mukumbang et al.,  
4209 2016). Contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes were reviewed against the entire data  
4210 set to identify similarities and differences, before they were linked and compiled into  
4211 summaries, diagrams, and tables (Marchal et al., 2012). Direct quotes from the  
4212 interviewees were then conceptually matched with each element of the CMO  
4213 configuration. The data from the follow-up interviews were analysed for contexts,  
4214 mechanisms, and outcomes, and CMO configurations were formed to unpack  
4215 students' long-term engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes. The CMO  
4216 configuration analysis was reviewed and checked by my supervisors.

#### 4217 ***5.2.7 Quality and Reporting Standards in Realist Evaluation***

4218 Consistent with Study 1, this realist evaluation was carried out in accordance  
4219 with the RAMESES II reporting and quality standards (Greenhalgh et al., 2017;  
4220 Wong et al., 2016).

### 4221 **5.3 Findings**

4222 In the following section, the findings from the realist evaluation are presented  
4223 under seven initial programme theories that were formulated based on the findings  
4224 from Study 1 (see Chapter 4) and the wider literature. The first six initial programme  
4225 theories relate to the short-term impact of TACKLE, and the seventh initial  
4226 programme theory unpacks the long-term sustainability effects of the programme. As  
4227 with Study 1, each initial programme theory is presented in a box and is followed by  
4228 a succinct summary of the theory and information regarding whether it was  
4229 supported, expanded, refined, or refuted in light of the data collected. Evidence  
4230 relating to each initial programme theory is then explained according to the  
4231 important contextual factors, mechanisms, and outcomes, which is followed by tables  
4232 detailing the CMO configurations. The CMO configurations are the output of the  
4233 data collected and prolonged engagement within the field. Quotes from interviews<sup>6</sup>  
4234 and extracts from field notes are provided to support the CMO configurations.  
4235 According to the evidence provided, the refined programme theories are discussed  
4236 and synthesised. Together, the CMO configurations and refined programme theories  
4237 are used to illustrate how and under what circumstances the TACKLE programme  
4238 impacted on students' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes.

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<sup>6</sup> Each student has been allocated a pseudonym; any quotes presented with a name are from interviews with students. When quotes are used from the teachers, they are explicitly labelled as teachers.



4239 **5.3.1 Initial Programme Theory 1: One-to-One Mentoring**

The mentor may provide an opportunity for students to feel listened to, supported, and valued (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Through prolonged engagement, the student can develop trust and respect for their mentor and in turn, they may feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, feelings, and personal aspects of their life with their mentor. Throughout the one-to-one mentoring process, the mentor may provide access to new perspectives, information, and advice. Further, as a result of similarities in interests, the student may look up to their mentor and feel driven to emulate their mentor's achievements. Consequently, the mentoring relationship may lead to improvements in students' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes.

4240 This initial programme theory explores the role of a one-to-one mentor.  
 4241 Overall, the findings from this evaluation supported certain elements of this theory.  
 4242 For instance, there was evidence to suggest that in certain contexts, many students  
 4243 felt listened to, supported, and were able to share their thoughts, feelings, and  
 4244 personal aspects of their life with their mentor. Through the provision of mentor's  
 4245 advice and guidance, there was evidence to indicate improvements in students  
 4246 conflict resolution skills and emotional regulation. However, differences in  
 4247 contextual factors and mechanisms did exist, and not all students benefited from the  
 4248 mentoring relationship. Furthermore, within the context of year 8 students, there was  
 4249 no evidence to support the proposition that students looked up to their mentor and  
 4250 felt driven to emulate their achievements. The findings pertaining to context,  
 4251 mechanism, and outcome patterns will be discussed below.

4252 **5.3.1.1 CMO Configuration 1.1: Conflict Resolution and Emotional**  
 4253 **Regulation.** Many students in TACKLE had experienced numerous behavioural  
 4254 (e.g., disobedience, aggression, and violence) and personal (e.g., poverty, parental  
 4255 separation, and parental substance abuse) challenges (context). Within this context,  
 4256 the mentors had extensive experience of working with students with behavioural  
 4257 challenges and complex backgrounds, they approached the relationships with  
 4258 patience and empathy, offering guidance and advice in relation to healthy conflict  
 4259 resolution skills and emotional regulation strategies (e.g., reappraisal and  
 4260 suppression) (mechanism). Many students described feeling supported and confided  
 4261 in their mentor about challenges with their peers, parents, and teachers (mechanism).  
 4262 As explained by Brayden: "I was telling [my mentor] about my behaviour and like  
 4263 any [behaviour] points I got. And like I tell him about stuff in school and [he] helps

4264 with things going on at home.” Similarly, Isaac shared: “I could tell [my mentor]  
4265 about my behaviour and arguments with the boys and teachers and things like that.”  
4266 Outcomes evident included the development of conflict resolution skills and  
4267 emotional regulation, improvements in behaviour, and relationships with peers and  
4268 teachers. For instance, Ellis revealed: “I admit my anger used to be bad. [My mentor]  
4269 taught me how to stay calm and say if I don’t agree with someone, [my mentor]  
4270 helped me to put the point across and then just leave it there.” Another student, Alex,  
4271 explained:

4272 I used to always be getting into fights over like little things. Like somebody  
4273 calling me names and we’d get into a fight. I control my anger better, because  
4274 [my mentor] made me see that I’m always gonna face stuff in life that’s  
4275 gonna make me angry. But like I know that when I’m angry, I have to  
4276 remember [to] walk away and remember what [my mentor] told me.

4277 Consistent with the voices of students, a teacher described the impact of the mentors  
4278 on students’ behaviour and conflict resolution skills:

4279 You could see a noticeable difference in a lot of the students. There was less  
4280 anger outbursts, swearing, or tantrums and things like that. I mean, because of  
4281 their home life and backgrounds; these students haven’t learnt everything that  
4282 they could have by this age. But I definitely think the [TACKLE] facilitators  
4283 taught them how to resolve things a bit better. I’ve seen Harrison today  
4284 apologising to someone and you know, that would have been a real struggle.  
4285 I’ve seen a lot of them have disagreements and rather than kicking and  
4286 shoving each other they might have a little word and then it’s over, you  
4287 know. The other day, Alex and Harrison, you know, they’d had words, but  
4288 they agreed to leave it there. I do think that they’ve got more skills to be able  
4289 to deal with difficult situations and confrontations in particular, with their  
4290 peers and teachers, you know. I mean, it’s not 100% of the time, but for them  
4291 we’re probably never gonna get 100%, are we? I think if we can see  
4292 improvement that’s something isn’t it?

4293 This CMO configuration is presented in Table 5.2.

4294 **Table 5.2**4295 *CMO Configuration 1.1: Conflict Resolution and Emotional Regulation*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Students experienced a number of behavioural (e.g., disobedience, aggression, and violence) and personal challenges (e.g., poverty, parental separation, and parental substance abuse).	Mentors had extensive experience of working with students with behavioural challenges and complex backgrounds, they approached the relationship with patience and empathy, offering guidance and advice in relation to healthy conflict resolution skills and emotional regulation strategies (e.g., reappraisal and suppression).	Students felt supported and confided in their mentor about challenges with their peers, parents, and teachers.	The development of conflict resolution skills and emotional regulation, improvements in pro-social behaviour, and relationships with peers and teachers.

4296 **5.3.1.2 CMO Configuration 1.2: Barriers to the Mentoring Relationship.**

4297 One of the barriers to the mentoring relationship was in contexts in which students  
4298 experienced chaotic home environments and challenges outside of school (e.g.,  
4299 housing instability and caregiving responsibilities for younger siblings). In such  
4300 contexts, during the process of relationship-building and getting to know the student,  
4301 the mentor asked questions and provided an opportunity for students to feel listened  
4302 to (mechanism). For a few students, it was evident that they experienced difficulties  
4303 articulating their thoughts, feelings, and emotions, and were uncomfortable and  
4304 reticent sharing personal aspects of their life with their mentor (mechanism). For  
4305 instance, some students replied with short responses to questions, while others  
4306 acknowledged that discussing personal challenges with adults in a 1-1 setting can be  
4307 “hard” and “complicated” (field notes). In such instances, this led to delays and  
4308 barriers to the formation of a relationship between the mentor and student (outcome).  
4309 This CMO configuration is explored further in Table 5.3.

4310 **Table 5.3**4311 *CMO Configuration 1.2: Barriers to the Mentoring Relationship*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Students experienced chaotic home environments and challenges outside of school (e.g., housing instability and caregiving responsibilities for younger siblings).	During the process of relationship-building and getting to know the student, the mentor asked questions and provided an opportunity for the student to feel listened to.	Students experienced difficulties articulating their thoughts, feelings, and emotions. They felt uncomfortable and reticent sharing personal aspects of their life and discussing challenges with their mentor.	This led to delays and barriers to the formation of a relationship between the mentor and student.

4312 **5.3.1.3 Refined Programme Theory 1: One-to-One Mentoring.** In the  
4313 context of students who had a history of behavioural (e.g., disobedience, aggression,  
4314 violence) and personal challenges (e.g., poverty, parental separation, and parental  
4315 substance abuse), many students felt supported and confided in their mentor about  
4316 challenges with their peers, parents, and teachers. Outcomes observed as a result  
4317 included the development of conflict resolution skills and emotional regulation,  
4318 improvements in behaviour, and relationships with peers and teachers. For other  
4319 students, however, a constraint to the mentoring relationship was contexts in which  
4320 students experienced chaotic home environments and challenges outside of school  
4321 (e.g., housing instability and caregiving responsibilities for younger siblings). In  
4322 these situations, students experienced difficulties articulating their thoughts, feelings,  
4323 and emotions, and were uncomfortable and reticent sharing and discussing personal  
4324 aspects of their life with their mentor. These findings correspond to attachment  
4325 theory (Bowlby, 1982) and the findings from previous research (Ahrens et al., 2011;  
4326 McLafferty et al., 2018; Rhodes, 2002; Sparks, 2004), which have indicated that  
4327 exposure to early childhood adversity can result in a young person becoming  
4328 mistrustful of others and lead to difficulties forming and maintaining relationships.

4329 **5.3.2 Initial Programme Theory 2: Classroom-Based Workshops**

In order to re-ignite engagement in learning and education, students who are passionate about sport, may benefit from classroom sessions which utilise the language of sport, sporting content, and active pedagogies to teach students subjects such as English and Mathematics and concepts such as leadership, respect, and teamwork (Spaij, 2012). Through integrating sporting examples into the school curriculum and enabling students to work cooperatively together in groups, problem solving, and exploring new ideas, the classroom sessions may succeed in engaging and motivating students to learn (Azzarito & Ennis, 2003; Bonnette et al., 2001). Further, by bringing students together with similar experiences, challenges, and backgrounds, they may be able to provide support and positive encouragement to one another and may develop trusting relationships based on shared understanding and collective experience.

4330 This initial programme theory refers to the pedagogical content implemented  
 4331 within the classroom setting and the type of peer relationships established. There was  
 4332 evidence to suggest that utilising the language of sport and active pedagogies  
 4333 facilitated student interaction and engagement during the classroom-based  
 4334 workshops. However, for certain students, the classroom sessions triggered different  
 4335 mechanisms and led to alternative outcomes. Furthermore, within the context of year  
 4336 eight students in comparison to year 10 students (see Chapter 4), there was an  
 4337 emergence of bullying practices and an enhancement of deviant behaviours among  
 4338 students. Such findings will be explored in more detail below.

4339 **5.3.2.1 CMO Configuration 2.1: Using Sporting Content to Re-Ignite**  
 4340 **Interest in Academic Learning.** In the context of students who were passionate  
 4341 about sport but disengaged towards academic learning and their curriculum subjects  
 4342 (e.g., English and Maths), the classroom sessions focused on using sporting content  
 4343 and active pedagogies to engage and stimulate students to learn (mechanism). For  
 4344 instance, a maths lesson was built around students working in groups to co-ordinate a  
 4345 trip to France to attend a rugby match, an English lesson focused on students  
 4346 establishing and designing their own sports clubs, while other sessions utilised  
 4347 sporting examples and team building challenges to teach students concepts such as  
 4348 leadership, respect, and teamwork.

4349 Such activities were perceived by several students as triggering mechanisms  
 4350 of interest, curiosity, and enjoyment towards learning. In Caleb's case, for example,  
 4351 he explained: "I liked them you know 'cause they made you learn loads of different

4352 things but in a fun way ‘cause it was all about rugby.” Alex also had similar views,  
 4353 he shared “Well even though they [the activities] was about literacy and maths and  
 4354 that, they were quite fun cause it was rugby stuff and group challenges.” In contrast,  
 4355 for other students, there was barriers that precluded their active participation in the  
 4356 activities, including a culture of hypermasculinity (i.e., emphasis on males displaying  
 4357 aggression, toughness, stoicism, and strength) and the competitive nature of the  
 4358 challenges that resulted in feelings of discomfort and frustration (mechanism).

4359 As such, different outcomes were generated for different students. For  
 4360 instance, for some students, outcomes observed as a result included the development  
 4361 of leadership and teamwork skills, higher levels of interaction and engagement  
 4362 (outcome). As explained by Rhodri, “Well ‘cause they were all team efforts, they  
 4363 made me listen to other people’s points of views, communicate more, and get on  
 4364 with people better.” Similarly, Harrison shared:

4365 Well, I mean, it helped with teamwork and leadership skills, ‘cause it was  
 4366 best to work together instead of just one doing all the work. We had to work  
 4367 out the prices to get to the game and we built the tower together. And for  
 4368 leadership that erm, it teached me you’ve got to be like, you’ve got to  
 4369 motivate the team and you’ve got to get them going if you wanna get a good  
 4370 result.

4371 For other students, however, outcomes evident included conflict, physical and verbal  
 4372 aggression, and bullying. This CMO configuration is presented in Table 5.4.

4373 **Table 5.4**

4374 *CMO Configuration 2.1: Using Sporting Content to Re-Ignite Interest in Academic*  
 4375 *Learning*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Students were passionate about sport but disengaged towards academic learning and their curriculum subjects (e.g., English and Maths).	Sporting content and active pedagogies were used to teach students subjects such as, English and Maths and concepts such as leadership, respect, and teamwork.	For some students, this triggered interest, curiosity, and enjoyment towards learning. However, for other students, there was barriers that precluded their active participation in the activities, including a culture of hypermasculinity and the competitive nature of the tasks, that led to feelings of discomfort and frustration.	For some, there was a development of leadership and teamwork skills, higher levels of interaction and engagement. For others, the activities led to conflict, physical and verbal aggression, and bullying amongst students.

4376                   **5.3.2.2 CMO Configuration 2.2: Feelings of Isolation, Intimidation, and**  
4377 **Frustration.** Several students described the negative impact bullying and name  
4378 calling (context) had on their engagement during the classroom workshops.  
4379 Specifically, the TACKLE programme incorporated a mixed group of students,  
4380 including, those students exhibiting aggression and behavioural challenges and  
4381 students possessing low self-esteem and social skills deficits (mechanism). This  
4382 amalgamation of students led to differences between students (e.g., loud and  
4383 assertive versus quiet and reserved) being emphasised during the classroom  
4384 workshops. As such, during observations and interviews, it became apparent that the  
4385 activities and interactions among students led to the emergence of some bullying  
4386 behaviours; consequently, this triggered feelings of isolation, intimidation, and  
4387 frustration among the students subject to bullying, and led to them experiencing  
4388 difficulties concentrating on the activities (mechanism). As Cameron acknowledged:  
4389 “The boys were continually picking on me and that, so, I couldn’t really take part [in  
4390 the group work] properly cause, erm, I didn’t wanna keep reacting to what they were  
4391 saying.” Brayden also experienced bullying by his peers during the classroom  
4392 activities: “Some of the boys can be quite mean and like, well they kept saying things  
4393 to me.” He further explained: “I liked the activities but [I] didn’t like talking to  
4394 anyone in the erm, group ‘cause I kept getting annoyed, so, [I] couldn’t concentrate  
4395 [on the activities].” This led to disengagement and a lack of participation during the  
4396 classroom sessions (outcome), as one of the teachers attested:  
4397                   There is arguing and bickering between certain students, you know, you hear  
4398                   that someone has said this, and someone’s said that, and unfortunately, it is  
4399                   certain individuals who receive the constant name calling. You can see their  
4400                   frustration and I do think that contributes to their disengagement in the  
4401                   classroom, you know.  
4402 Table 5.5 summarises CMO configuration 2.2.

4403 **Table 5.5**4404 *CMO Configuration 2.2: Feelings of Isolation, Intimidation, and Frustration*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
A number of students were subject to name calling and bullying in TACKLE.	TACKLE incorporated a mixed group of students displaying various risk factors (e.g., students exhibiting behavioural problems and aggression, and students exhibiting low self-esteem and social skills deficits). This amalgamation of students led to differences between students been emphasised during the classroom workshops.	This led to the emergence of bullying behaviours and triggered feelings of isolation, intimidation, and frustration amongst certain students. As such, these students described how they struggled to concentrate on the activities and tasks.	Disengagement and a lack of participation during the activities.

4405 **5.3.2.3 CMO Configuration 2.3: Deviant Peer Contagion.** A number of  
4406 students involved in TACKLE shared similar backgrounds and behavioural  
4407 challenges, including disobedience, inattentiveness, verbal aggression, and physical  
4408 violence (context). By bringing such students together in a classroom setting,  
4409 interactions with one another were intensified and heightened (mechanism). The  
4410 students indicated that clustering students with similar backgrounds and behavioural  
4411 challenges resulted in an increase in deviant and disruptive behaviours among  
4412 students (mechanism). For instance, Isaac shared: “The boys in TACKLE, they  
4413 [have] got all the same problems as me so, and like some of them are naughtier than  
4414 me. I reckon being around people like that, makes you like naughtier and naughtier.”  
4415 In a similar way, when asked to discuss the impact of his peers during the classroom  
4416 sessions, Caleb explained how he would misbehave in order to entertain his peers:  
4417 I don’t know, because of the type of people in TACKLE, I find myself  
4418 attention seeking because that is all I do, I try to make them [peers] laugh all  
4419 the time. Then when people laugh, it encourages me to do it more. I put the  
4420 blame on the boys [In TACKLE] I am trying to make laugh but then... it is  
4421 mostly my fault.  
4422 He further explained:  
4423 When I’m not around them [the students in TACKLE] and I’m with like sort  
4424 of people who I don’t like but the brainy people, I’m fine. So, like last year’s  
4425 Maths, I sat by Sophie and Lucas, so, like I was getting Level 6s in Maths,  
4426 you know. Because you know, you’re not expected to get that [level 6] until



4427 year 9. So, like when I'm around people like them, Sophie and Lucas, I'm  
4428 fine.

4429 Such narratives suggest that by bringing a number of students together with similar  
4430 behavioural challenges, there was an increase in behaviour-related issues during the  
4431 classroom workshops (outcome). This CMO is summarised in Table 5.6.

4432 **Table 5.6**

4433 *CMO Configuration 2.3: Deviant Peer Contagion*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Within TACKLE, a number of students shared similar backgrounds and behavioural challenges (e.g., disobedience, inattentiveness, verbal aggression, and physical violence).	The classrooms sessions brought these students together in a classroom setting where interactions with one another were intensified and heightened.	This group composition stimulated and encouraged deviant and disruptive behaviour amongst students.	Increased behaviour-related issues during the classroom workshops.

4434 **5.3.2.4 Refined Programme Theory 2: Classroom-Based Workshops.**

4435 Consistent with the initial programme theory, for some students, the integration of  
4436 sporting content and active pedagogies into the school curriculum proved to be  
4437 important mechanisms through which classroom sessions led to higher levels of  
4438 teamwork, interaction, and engagement. However, for other students, there were  
4439 barriers that precluded their active participation in the activities, including a culture  
4440 of hypermasculinity and competition that resulted in feelings of discomfort and  
4441 frustration. In turn, this led to the emergence of bullying behaviours and conflict  
4442 among students. These findings resonate with previous studies (Bramham, 2003;  
4443 Swain, 2006), which concluded that the inclusion of sport and competitive activities  
4444 among boys can lead to bullying behaviours and practices due to the reinforcement  
4445 and enactment of hegemonic masculine identities and 'top dog' competitive cultures  
4446 (Bramham, 2003; Haegele & Kirk, 2018; Hickey, 2008; Salisbury & Jackson, 1996).

4447 In contexts where students experienced bullying and name calling, the  
4448 incorporation of a mixed group of students (e.g., those exhibiting aggression and  
4449 behavioural challenges and those displaying low self-esteem and social skills  
4450 deficits) led to differences between students being highlighted. For several students,

4451 this triggered feelings of isolation, intimidation, and frustration, leading to  
 4452 difficulties concentrating on the activities and disengagement. Furthermore, in the  
 4453 context of students who shared similar behavioural challenges (e.g., disobedience,  
 4454 inattentiveness, verbal aggression, and physical violence), the assembling of students  
 4455 with similar challenges led to an increase in deviant and disruptive behaviours.

### 4456 *5.3.3 Initial Programme Theory 3: Sport and Physical Activity*

By providing disengaged students with leadership responsibilities (e.g., refereeing different sports) and opportunities to display their sporting talents, they may develop leadership skills and experience feelings of competency, empowerment, and pride. Opportunities for disengaged students to experience feelings of competency, empowerment, and pride have been recognised in the literature as mechanisms that can contribute to desirable engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes (Danish & Nellen, 1997; Ungar & Teram, 2000). Furthermore, the TACKLE programme may provide students with an opportunity to experience new activities (e.g., a stadium tour and free tickets to attend a professional rugby match) that they may otherwise have limited access to due to financial constraints. As a result of these activities, students may experience enhanced social cohesion and connections with others.

4457 This initial programme theory explores the role of sport as a potential strategy  
 4458 for improving students' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes.  
 4459 Consistent with the initial programme theory, there was evidence to support the  
 4460 importance of providing opportunities for students to display their sporting talents,  
 4461 and to lead and referee various sports. However, the programme theory was also  
 4462 expanded. For instance, for some students, exposure to different activities and  
 4463 challenges triggered mechanisms of frustration and vulnerability. Furthermore,  
 4464 according to the data, there was evidence to suggest that the TACKLE programme  
 4465 provided students with access to new opportunities.

4466 **5.3.3.1 CMO Configuration 3.1: Praise and Positive Feedback.** Students  
 4467 involved in TACKLE typically received limited praise and positive feedback within  
 4468 school. For many students, this lack of praise was often mirrored in their lives  
 4469 outside of the school setting (context). In such contexts, TACKLE provided  
 4470 opportunities for students to display their sporting talents and to lead and officiate  
 4471 sports where they felt interested, passionate, and competent. Through involvement in  
 4472 such activities, students received praise and feedback from TACKLE facilitators and  
 4473 teachers (mechanism). As evidenced in the following quote from a teacher:

4474 It [TACKLE] gave the students an opportunity to get a lot of positivity,  
4475 positive recognition, and reinforcement you know, and to do something they  
4476 enjoy doing which all the students need and it comes back then to what  
4477 they've got going on in school and their personal lives, they don't have a lot  
4478 of praise and positive things happening. You know, in their home life,  
4479 they've got very troubled backgrounds and difficult situations.

4480 As a result of receiving praise and positive feedback, students spoke of experiencing  
4481 feelings of competency, empowerment, and pride (mechanism). For instance,  
4482 according to Alex, involvement in the sporting activities allowed him to "feel proud  
4483 cause other people were cheering me on and that." Isaac shared similar views, he  
4484 explained how he felt "good because it was fun, we got to ref [referee] and play  
4485 rugby, and the coaches [TACKLE facilitators] asked me like who it is I play for and  
4486 they said that I was good like."

4487 Outcomes evident as a result included enhanced confidence in students' own  
4488 abilities and improved leadership skills. As Caleb explained:

4489 I used to not call for the ball at all but now I do, 'cause I've got more belief in  
4490 myself. It's [TACKLE] helped my rugby, taught me to communicate more  
4491 on the pitch, speaking up for myself more, [and] being more respectful to  
4492 other teams.

4493 Jamie corroborated these sentiments, he described:

4494 TACKLE encouraged me through the rugby. It taught me that you've gotta  
4495 lead your team and help your teammates, help them to get better. You got to  
4496 try out drills you've been working on when you're playing 'cause that's what  
4497 games are for. And you have to shake hands at the end with your opponents  
4498 and stuff like that.

4499 Another student, who was chosen for one of the ambassador awards because of his  
4500 leadership skills, explained: It gave me more confidence in myself because it  
4501 [winning the award] means I've actually done good, and I've improved." This CMO  
4502 configuration is summarised in Table 5.7.

4503 **Table 5.7**4504 *CMO Configuration 3.1: Praise and Positive Feedback*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Students typically received limited praise and positive feedback within school. For many students, this lack of praise was often mirrored in their lives outside of the school setting.	The programme provided opportunities for students to display their sporting talents and to lead and officiate sports where they felt interested, passionate, and competent. Through involvement in such activities, students received positive praise from TACKLE facilitators and teachers.	Students experienced feelings of competency, empowerment, and pride.	Enhanced confidence in students' own abilities and improved leadership skills.

4505 **5.3.3.2 CMO Configuration 3.2: The Sin-Bin Strategy.** Several students in  
 4506 TACKLE had low self-esteem and limited coping strategies to respond to challenges  
 4507 and stressors (context). As observed by one of the teachers:

4508 It is a confidence thing; some of them [the students] have definitely got low  
 4509 self-esteem, they don't think of themselves very highly at all. You do hear 'I  
 4510 can't' a lot and you know; they are vulnerable, they lack the skills needed to  
 4511 solve different types of situations.

4512 Throughout the programme, students experienced frustration and vulnerability when  
 4513 they engaged in different activities and challenges that were outside their comfort  
 4514 zone. For instance, when taking part in an inflatable rugby passing drill, one of the  
 4515 students struggled to throw the rugby ball into the target and vented his frustration by  
 4516 aggressively kicking the ball onto the next field (field notes). One teacher understood  
 4517 the student's frustration: "He's terrible if he doesn't feel he can do what he's doing,  
 4518 so, that incident with him on the field, was just because of his frustration that he  
 4519 couldn't get the ball in the target." The implementation of a 'sin-bin'<sup>7</sup> and time-out  
 4520 strategy provided students with time away from the activity to reflect and recalibrate  
 4521 (mechanism). This strategy helped students to calm down and manage their feelings  
 4522 and emotions (mechanism). As Logan, stated: "Helped me to like calm down I  
 4523 reckon." Alex shared similar views, he explained: "It [sin-bin strategy] was good  
 4524 'cause it made me take my mind of it [stressor]." Consequently, outcomes evident as

<sup>7</sup> The sin-bin is a strategy used in professional rugby, where players who have received a yellow card offence must leave the game for ten minutes.

4525 a result included a willingness among students to re-engage with the activity and  
4526 improved emotional regulation. Table 5.8 explicates this CMO Configuration.

4527 **Table 5.8**

4528 *CMO Configuration 3.2: The Sin-Bin Strategy*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Several students in TACKLE had low self-esteem and limited coping strategies to respond to challenges and stressors.	Students experienced frustration and vulnerability when they engaged in different activities and challenges that were outside of their comfort zone. The implementation of a 'sin-bin' and time out strategy enabled students time away from the activity to reflect and recalibrate.	This strategy helped students to calm down and manage their feelings and emotions.	A willingness amongst students to re-engage with the activity, improved emotional regulation.

4529 **5.3.3.3 CMO Configuration 3.3: Access and Exposure to New**  
4530 **Opportunities.** Within the context of students who experienced high levels of  
4531 poverty, socioeconomic adversity, and poor school attendance, TACKLE provided  
4532 exposure to new opportunities (mechanism), including tickets to a professional rugby  
4533 match and a tour of the stadium. For many, including students Caleb and Leo,  
4534 visiting the stadium was a new experience. They acknowledged that: "I'd like to go  
4535 to another Ospreys game because that was the first ever game I've actually been to,  
4536 in the stadium" (Caleb) and "just got to see erm, you know, the actual stadium, never  
4537 been in one before. It [the stadium] was big (Leo)." Access to new opportunities  
4538 triggered mechanisms of excitement and happiness among students and enhanced  
4539 motivation to attend school (mechanism). The excitement of the students was  
4540 reflected in one of the teacher's comments:

4541 They [the students] were always ready waiting to come to TACKLE. I  
4542 remember that there was a time when one of them [one of the students], he'd  
4543 missed his bus, and he'd you know, usually would have been 'Oh I've missed  
4544 my bus I'll stay at home' but he'd walked to school and got here 'cause he  
4545 was excited to come and go to the stadium. You know, they erm, they really  
4546 liked the stadium tour and the ones who were at the game just loved it.

4547 Further, Cameron described how he proudly shared his experiences of the stadium  
4548 tour with his friends: "I was telling them [my friends] that we went in big rooms

4549 where the players sit and sat in the chairs down the field, and they all want to start  
4550 coming TACKLE now.”

4551 The outcomes evident as a result, included improvements in students’  
4552 existing relationships with their peers and increased school attendance. As explained  
4553 by Ellis: “There was an improvement with Rhodri, Caleb, and Brayden, we never  
4554 really used to speak but like I talked to them more ‘cause I sat by them at the match.”  
4555 Further, improvements in attendance were also evident, as Rhodri commented: “My  
4556 attendance is better now than what it was because it’s made me want to come in to  
4557 school and go to TACKLE, otherwise I wouldn’t have got to see the stadium and  
4558 that.” The corresponding CMO configuration is presented in Table 5.9.

4559 **Table 5.9**

4560 *CMO Configuration 3.3: Access and Exposure to New Opportunities*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Students experienced high levels of poverty, socioeconomic adversity (e.g., single parent-households), and poor school attendance.	The resource was providing access and exposure to new opportunities (e.g., a stadium tour and free tickets to attend a rugby match with TACKLE facilitators and their teachers).	Access to new opportunities triggered feelings of excitement and happiness amongst students, and enhanced motivation to attend school.	Improvements in students’ existing relationships with their peers and increased school attendance.

4561 **5.3.3.4 Refined Programme Theory 3: Sport and Physical Activity.** In  
4562 accordance with the initial programme theory, there was evidence to suggest that. in  
4563 the context of students who received limited praise and positive feedback, the  
4564 opportunity to display their sporting talents and to lead and officiate various sports  
4565 enabled students to receive praise and to experience feelings of competency,  
4566 empowerment, and pride. Outcomes evident as a result included enhanced  
4567 confidence in students’ abilities and improved leadership skills.

4568 Furthermore, in the context of students who had low self-esteem and limited  
4569 coping strategies, exposure to different activities and challenges triggered feelings of  
4570 frustration and vulnerability. The implementation of a sin-bin strategy, however,  
4571 enabled students time away from the activity to reflect and recalibrate. This led to a  
4572 willingness amongst students to re-engage with the activity and improved emotional  
4573 regulation.

4574 Many students in the programme experienced high levels of poverty,  
 4575 socioeconomic adversity, and poor school attendance. In such contexts, TACKLE  
 4576 provided access and exposure to new opportunities (e.g., a visit to the stadium to  
 4577 watch a professional rugby match and a stadium tour), this triggered mechanisms of  
 4578 excitement and happiness among students and led to improvements in students'  
 4579 existing relationships with their peers and increased school attendance.

#### 4580 **5.3.4 Initial Programme Theory 4: Professional Athlete**

For students who are interested in, and passionate about rugby, the involvement of a professional rugby player may play an important role in enhancing students' engagement, motivation, and confidence (Armour & Duncombe, 2012). Specifically, through the rugby player sharing their own background, challenges experienced at school, the regret of not working hard enough in school, the obstacles they have overcome, and their current career pathways outside of professional sport, students may be able to envision the opportunities available to them post-school and develop a realisation of the importance of school completion.

4581 This initial programme theory relates to the positive role a professional  
 4582 athlete may play in students' lives. According to the data, it was evident that many  
 4583 students were engaged, interested, and inspired by the rugby player's achievements  
 4584 outside of professional sport.

4585 **5.3.4.1 CMO Configuration 4.1: Orientation Towards the Future.** There  
 4586 were similarities between the students and the professional rugby player (e.g.,  
 4587 socioeconomic background, values, and interests). During interviews and informal  
 4588 conversations, it became apparent that many students valued how the rugby player  
 4589 was from the same area and shared an understanding of socioeconomic adversity  
 4590 (context). As evidenced in the following quote by Caleb: "Well obviously, [the rugby  
 4591 player] lives in a massive house now with a gym and that, but he'd grown up around  
 4592 here with nothing, like not much at Christmas." Similarly, Leo noted: "Cause like he  
 4593 lived with his mother, and she was a single parent... So, he was from a poor family  
 4594 growing up." During the workshop, the athlete shared with students his regret of not  
 4595 having worked hard enough at school, his apprenticeship route, and the businesses he  
 4596 had established outside of professional sport (mechanism). Many students were  
 4597 engaged, interested, and inspired by the rugby player's ambition and achievements,  
 4598 and described enhanced motivation to work hard in school (mechanism). As Alex  
 4599 and Jacob's comments revealed: "Well, he [rugby player] has about 3 different

4600 businesses, doesn't he? That's just class! I know where one of them [businesses] are  
4601 and why it's called what it is... It [listening to the player] made me wanna be better  
4602 in school" (Alex) and "He's opened up businesses with his mates and that. If I tried  
4603 more [in school] I could get on an apprenticeship after school like he did and get  
4604 different trades behind me (Jacob)." A teacher also commented on the impact of the  
4605 rugby player:

4606         It was brilliant. I thought [the rugby player] was just fantastic. And I suppose  
4607         as well for all of them, you know, I'm not saying it's like, oh yeah, they've  
4608         all decided now that this is what they want to do but I think it's planted some  
4609         seeds. It's planted that seed, so, it's just given them a little bit of inspiration  
4610         and given them a little bit of you know, to have a little bit of thought into  
4611         what they are going to do in the future. I mean, they are very young, they're  
4612         not going to, you know, like in Year 11, there's pressure on them to decide  
4613         what they are going to do next. So, for these students, it isn't about decision  
4614         making but I think it's given them motivation and it's planted some seeds, so,  
4615         that when, in year 10 or 11, they need to start thinking more seriously,  
4616         they've got a little more insight and a little bit more fact and information  
4617         around it [different options]. And now it's around making that seed grow into  
4618         an idea and I think also, if they are having one of those days, we will say "Do  
4619         you remember when [the rugby player] came in and he said, he was a  
4620         nightmare at school and wanted his time back again..."

4621         As a result, the evident outcomes included students developing orientation  
4622         towards their future and expressing feelings of hope and optimism. As acknowledged  
4623         by Ellis: "I'd like to have my own business, like my own garage, 'cause I've always  
4624         worked better with my hands." Likewise, Caleb explained:

4625         I want to buy my own car dealership and invest the money then... A  
4626         populated one, Nissan or Renault, you see. Because for me, I think, because I  
4627         grew up not having money, I think if I was to have money, I'd be different  
4628         with my kids, I don't think I would spoil them. I wouldn't spoil them loads  
4629         and loads but I would a little bit...

4630         The corresponding CMO configuration is presented in Table 5.10.



4631 **Table 5.10**4632 *CMO Configuration 4.1: Orientation Towards the Future*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
There were shared similarities between students' and the professional rugby player (e.g., socioeconomic background, values, and interests).	The athlete shared with students his regret of not having worked hard enough in school, his apprenticeship route, and the businesses he had established outside of professional sport.	During the talk, students were engaged, interested, and inspired by the rugby player's ambition and achievements. Many described enhanced motivation to work harder in school.	Students developed orientation towards their future and expressed feelings of hope and optimism.

4633 **5.3.4.2 Refined Programme Theory 4: Professional Athlete.** In the context  
4634 of shared similarities between students' and the professional athlete (e.g.,  
4635 socioeconomic background, values, and interests), listening to the athlete triggered  
4636 mechanisms of engagement, interest, inspiration, and motivation to work harder in  
4637 school. Outcomes observed as a result, included students developing orientation  
4638 towards their future and expressing feelings of hope and optimism.

4639 **5.3.5 Initial Programme Theory 5: The Importance of a Multi-Component**  
4640 **Programme**

In order to re-ignite students' engagement and interest, a singular effort or approach may not be sufficient (Mawn et al., 2017; Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019). To accommodate for each student's varied needs, they may need to receive exposure to a diversity of modalities, resources, and support mechanisms (Rajasekaran & Reyes, 2019). Through exposure to a diversity of modalities, including one-to-one mentoring, classroom-based learning, sport and physical activity, and forms of social support such as emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental types of support, students' engagement and interest in learning and education may be enhanced.

4641 This initial programme theory is about the interaction of the different  
4642 modalities and the exposure to various forms of social support. There was evidence  
4643 to support the initial programme theory. For instance, the diversity of modalities and  
4644 the presence of positive social support led to increased school attendance and higher  
4645 levels of connection and engagement with school.

4646 **5.3.5.1 CMO Configuration 5.1: Access to Support, Guidance, and**

4647 **Resources.** Within TACKLE, students experienced instability in their family lives

4648 and lacked access to emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental types of  
 4649 support (context). Through involvement in the TACKLE programme, students  
 4650 experienced diverse modalities and accessed multiple sources of social support from  
 4651 various role models (e.g., TACKLE facilitators, mentors, teachers, and a professional  
 4652 athlete). For many students, this triggered feelings of being supported and led to  
 4653 enhanced motivation to attend school. Rhodri remarked: “The [TACKLE facilitators]  
 4654 helped me to keep on the right path and try more in school.” This experience was  
 4655 shared by Isaac, who explained: “it made me come to school, ‘cause it was fun,  
 4656 getting to play loads of rugby like, and [we] wasn’t in the classroom all the time. I  
 4657 got to hang around with friends and [TACKLE facilitators] and meet different  
 4658 people.” Likewise, Brayden attested: “There was people in the TACKLE project that  
 4659 I could count on.” Consequently, this led to positive outcomes for students, including  
 4660 increased school attendance and higher levels of connection and engagement with  
 4661 school. This CMO Configuration is presented in Table 5.11.

4662 **Table 5.11**

4663 *CMO Configuration 5.11: Access to Support, Guidance, and Resources*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Students experienced instability in their family lives and lacked access to emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental types of support.	Students received a diversity of modalities (mentoring, classroom-based learning, sport) and accessed multiple sources of social support from various role models (e.g., TACKLE facilitators, mentors, teachers, and a professional athlete).	This triggered feelings of being supported and enhanced motivation to attend school.	Increased school attendance, higher levels of connection and engagement with school.

4664

4665 **5.3.5.2 Refined Programme Theory 5: The Importance of a Multi-**  
 4666 **Component Programme.** The data corroborated the initial programme theory. For  
 4667 instance, by exposing students to a diversity of modalities and support structures, it  
 4668 was evident that student felt supported and were motivated to attend school.  
 4669 Consequently, this led to positive outcomes for students, including increased school  
 4670 attendance and higher levels of connection and engagement with school. Such  
 4671 findings support the proposition that providing access to various modalities, support  
 4672 structures, and role models can increase the likelihood that students will attend  
 4673 school and re-engage with their education.

4674 **5.3.6 Initial Programme Theory 6: The Ethos of TACKLE Facilitators**

In the context of students who receive negativity within their school environment (e.g., deficit-based messaging), they may be particularly drawn to the strength-based resources and caring ethos of the TACKLE programme and facilitators. This type of approach may help students to identify and recognise their own strengths, assets, and capacities (Jalala et al., 2020; Noddings, 2005). As such, through the endorsement of a strengths-based approach and the implementation of an ethic of care, TACKLE may enhance students' perceptions of competence and confidence in their own abilities.

4675            This initial programme theory relates to the ethos and approach of the  
 4676 TACKLE programme and facilitators. In accordance with the theory, there was  
 4677 evidence to suggest that the implementation of a strengths-based approach and an  
 4678 ethic of care facilitated feelings of competence among students and enhanced  
 4679 confidence in their own abilities. In addition, there was data to support the  
 4680 importance of building mutual trust and respect between students and the TACKLE  
 4681 facilitators.

4682            **5.3.6.1 CMO Configuration 6.1: Strengths-Based and Caring Ethos.** A  
 4683 number of students experienced low self-esteem, insecurity, and self-doubt. Many  
 4684 received deficit-based messaging and a lack of caring behaviours from teachers  
 4685 within the school setting (context). For instance, Jacob described how several of his  
 4686 teachers did not believe he was capable of performing well in their classes, which  
 4687 caused him to give up easily during academic challenges:

4688            Some of them [my teachers] say that my answers are wrong all [of] the time  
 4689 and that I'm not going to do well. They say it's cause I'm not listening, but I  
 4690 am, I just don't get it, so, I give up if I find something hard 'cause they  
 4691 [teachers] don't think I can do it.

4692 Likewise, a teacher who worked closely with students and alongside the TACKLE  
 4693 programme, described the difference between their own philosophy and pedagogical  
 4694 practices to that of fellow colleagues:

4695            Teachers aren't always the most, you know, they just recognise the bad things  
 4696 and not the good things... Sometimes when I talk to teachers, well, I can't  
 4697 expect them to do what I do. So, you know, the session that we did in the  
 4698 gym, I wrote a list of everything they'd [the students] done well, you know,  
 4699 it's lovely seeing them do good things. So, like Isaac, is one for me. He

4700 shows such good leadership skills. It's showing them [the students] that they  
4701 can do things, they have got skills, and they have got strengths!

4702 Throughout the programme, TACKLE facilitators demonstrated care for the  
4703 students, by developing knowledge of each students' skills, hobbies, and interests,  
4704 and helping students to identify and recognise the strengths they possess  
4705 (mechanism). As a consequence, it was evident students perceived that the TACKLE  
4706 facilitators cared about and believed in them (mechanism). For instance, Cameron  
4707 described: "They [TACKLE facilitators] believe in me and make me feel more  
4708 confident in myself." This feeling was shared by Rhodri, he explained: "I reckon I  
4709 believe in myself a bit more like because he helped me see what I can do and my  
4710 skills."

4711 Outcomes evident as a result included enhanced feelings of competence and  
4712 confidence in their own abilities. Isaac explained, for example: "It's given me more  
4713 confidence 'cause it made me see that I've got good communication and leadership  
4714 skills and stuff like that." In a similar way, Jacob stated:

4715 Like [the TACKLE facilitators] told me that you know, "you can do it"  
4716 [classwork work] and that. And they helped with my confidence 'cause they  
4717 helped with my knowledge. Like [the facilitators] was telling us some things  
4718 and some of those questions were in the PE exam. He kept saying like what  
4719 frequency means like.

4720 Table 5.12 summarises this CMO Configuration.

4721 **Table 5.12**

4722 *CMO Configuration 6.1: Strengths-Based and Caring Ethos*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
A number of students experienced low self-esteem, insecurity, and self-doubt. Many received deficit-based messaging and a lack of caring behaviours by teachers within their school.	TACKLE facilitators demonstrated care for the students by developing knowledge on each students' skills, hobbies, and interests, and helping students to identify and recognise the strengths and attributes in which they possess.	Students felt that TACKLE facilitators cared about and believed in them.	Enhanced feelings of competence and confidence in their own abilities.

4723 **5.3.6.2 CMO Configuration 6.2: The Building of Trust and Respect.** The  
4724 findings from the observations and interviews revealed that many students had

4725 internalised feelings of mistrust towards teachers and authority figures (context). For  
 4726 instance, Jacob expressed his low levels of trust: “I’m not too fussy on them  
 4727 [teachers], cause some of them treat you like they’re better, and always find a reason  
 4728 to make things your fault. But you know, you can’t trust them see.” In a similar vein,  
 4729 Leo explained: “Most teachers here get stricter and stricter and when they come over  
 4730 [to me] in the yard, [I] don’t tell them anything.”

4731 In the context of an existing mistrust between students and teachers, the  
 4732 students indicated that the relationships formed with TACKLE facilitators were  
 4733 different and unique. Specifically, many students appreciated that they could interact  
 4734 with facilitators on a first-name basis and that facilitators actively participated in the  
 4735 practical activities, classroom activities, and reward sessions alongside them  
 4736 (mechanism). As explained by Rhodri: “It wasn’t like normal teachers. You get  
 4737 treated more different. ‘Cause like you call [TACKLE facilitators] by their names  
 4738 and they take part in like the practical and the other stuff.”

4739 The familiarity, stability, and continuity of the TACKLE facilitators across  
 4740 each modality led to students feeling comfortable around and trusting the facilitators  
 4741 (mechanism). Caleb described: “I liked it ‘cause we got the same [facilitators] with  
 4742 us in everything [each modality] and so I got to know them more. I liked all of them  
 4743 [facilitators] really.” Outcomes evident as a result included the building of trust and  
 4744 respect between students and TACKLE facilitators. This CMO configuration is  
 4745 presented in Table 5.13.

4746 **Table 5.13**

4747 *CMO Configuration 6.2: The Building of Trust and Respect*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Many students had internalised feelings of mistrust towards teachers and authority figures.	In TACKLE, students interacted with facilitators on a first-name basis and facilitators actively participated in each modality (e.g., classroom, practical, and reward sessions) alongside the students.	The familiarity, stability, and continuity of the TACKLE facilitators across each component led to the building of trust and students feeling comfortable around the facilitators.	The building of trust and respect between students and TACKLE facilitators.

4748 **5.3.6.3 Refined Programme Theory 6: The Ethos of TACKLE**

4749 **Facilitators.** Consistent with the initial programme theory, there was evidence to

4750 support the importance of TACKLE facilitators endorsing a strengths-based  
 4751 approach and implementing an ethic of care. Specifically, within the context of  
 4752 students who experienced low self-esteem, insecurity, self-doubt, and negativity  
 4753 within their school environment, exposure to the TACKLE programme and to caring  
 4754 and strengths-based facilitators led to students feeling that they were cared about and  
 4755 believed in. In turn, this led to enhanced feelings of competence and confidence in  
 4756 their own abilities. Furthermore, in the context of an existing mistrust between  
 4757 students and teachers within the school setting, the students particularly valued the  
 4758 types of relationships established with TACKLE facilitators. Specifically, students  
 4759 appreciated that they could interact with facilitators on a first-name basis and how  
 4760 facilitators actively participated in the practical activities, classroom activities, and  
 4761 reward sessions alongside them. The familiarity, stability, and continuity of the  
 4762 TACKLE facilitators across each modality led to students feeling comfortable  
 4763 around the facilitators and building mutual trust and respect.

4764 ***5.3.7 Initial Programme Theory 7: Are any Changes Sustained? If Not, Why Not?***  
 4765 ***For Whom? In What Contexts?***

In the context of students who experience low self-esteem, disengagement towards school, and less complex home environments, the resources of the TACKLE programme may be sufficient to sustain improvements in students' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes. However, in the context of students who encounter extremely complex home environments and difficult circumstances outside of the school setting, evidence suggests that the positive effects of programmes may diminish over time (Bloom, 2010). Consequently, within the context of heightened complexity, the TACKLE programme may not have sufficient leverage to sustain long-term improvements in students' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes.

4766 This initial programme theory refers to the sustainability effects of the  
 4767 TACKLE programme. In order to test the initial programme theory, data were  
 4768 collected 3, 6, and 10 months after the completion of the TACKLE programme.  
 4769 There was evidence to corroborate the initial theory. Specifically, within the context  
 4770 of students who experienced less chaotic lives outside of the school setting, it was  
 4771 evident that the resources of the programme were sufficient to sustain improvements  
 4772 in engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes. However, for students who  
 4773 experienced exceptionally complex lives outside of the education context, the  
 4774 programme did not lead to lasting positive developmental outcomes among students.

4775           **5.3.7.1 CMO Configuration 7.1: Sustained Improvements in Self-Esteem,**  
4776 **Attitude, and Behaviour.** In the context of eight students who experienced low self-  
4777 esteem, disengagement towards school (e.g., limited involvement and poor conduct  
4778 during academic activities), and less chaotic home environments, there was evidence  
4779 to suggest that TACKLE provided sufficient resources to sustain the reaction of  
4780 improved self-esteem, attitude, and behaviour (mechanism). Outcomes observed as a  
4781 result included improved engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes  
4782 during curriculum lessons. For example, during the follow-up interviews, a few  
4783 students noted how the programme had contributed to increased self-esteem. As  
4784 Jamie explained: “It’s given me the confidence to talk in front of people ‘cause we  
4785 did a lot of working in groups and presenting stuff in TACKLE” (6-month  
4786 interview). Likewise, Rhodri shared: “In TACKLE, we had to speak up and say what  
4787 we think. That gave me more confidence ‘cause it’s helped me to speak more in class  
4788 like I didn’t really speak in class” (3-month interview). As for Jacob, he stated:  
4789 “There was an impact on like my confidence, like the way I was around people, like  
4790 in a group project or subjects like Drama I wouldn’t really talk but now I join in  
4791 ‘cause like I feel more confident.” (6-month interview).

4792           During the follow-up interviews, the students also highlighted improvements  
4793 in their attitude and behaviour. Leo, explained: “I don’t escalate small problems as  
4794 much, it [TACKLE] taught me to be like more calmer in like different situations” (6  
4795 month interview). While another student, Cameron described (6-month interview):

4796           I’ve started to shape up a bit, yeah... Because it taught me to be a bit more  
4797 respectful to other people and made me like dedicate myself more, like, be  
4798 more disciplined. So, if I’m quite tired and don’t wanna do work, I try to  
4799 remember my discipline and things the [TACKLE facilitators] were telling  
4800 us.

4801           In a similar way, Caleb explained how the programme had brought new resources of  
4802 perspective and encouraged him to exert more effort and improve his behaviour  
4803 during lessons (3-month interview):

4804           TACKLE made me see that I am here to learn and that you see, and that even  
4805 though I’m still obviously working on [my] behaviour and stuff, it’s made me  
4806 put more effort in. So, like yesterday I had to write an essay in geography,  
4807 had to write 3 pages, and then the lesson after, I had to write another 3 pages,  
4808 and then the lesson after that, I had to write another 2. Before TACKLE, I

4809 mean, I probably wouldn't have even wrote a page, but I do see things a bit  
4810 different now and that's what you gotta expect when you get into year 9, you  
4811 have to work hard and write essays after essays.

4812 A number of students also spoke about plans for their future and occupations they  
4813 were considering, including working as an accountant, plasterer, construction  
4814 labourer, police officer, a marine, electrical, and gas engineer, and a physiotherapist.  
4815 These thoughts about their future appeared to have been triggered by participating in  
4816 TACKLE. One student, Leo, described how the TACKLE programme had motivated  
4817 him to start thinking about his future: "It [TACKLE] did have an impact because it  
4818 has made me think a bit more seriously about what I'm gonna do and the subjects I  
4819 need to pass and that" (10-month interview). Further, Caleb, explained how the talk  
4820 from the professional rugby player in particular had stimulated him to start exploring  
4821 options for his future (6-month interview):

4822 Well, he [rugby player] shocked me with some of the things he said... He  
4823 taught me stuff about things I never knew, and I realised that GCSEs are  
4824 important 'cause it depends on what job you want really... I think I know the  
4825 GCSEs I want to take, well I know two, but I don't know what third one to do  
4826 see... I wanna go to university. I went there [university] with the school, and  
4827 it was really nice, they had a gym, they had loads of pitches to play sports.

4828 Consistent with the students, one of the teachers had also noticed improvements in  
4829 students' confidence, behaviour, and attitude towards school (6-month interview):

4830 I think the ones [students] that were lacking confidence and who were more  
4831 disengaged but not massively concerning behaviour wise. So, the likes of  
4832 Jacob, Rhodri, Alex, Leo, Logan, Cameron, have shown improvements and  
4833 Jamie, I think for them they took a lot from the programme, in terms of their  
4834 attitude towards school, communication skills, and it helped to raise their  
4835 confidence in certain situations... I think Caleb for example, you know, he's  
4836 improved loads, really turned it around, a lot less destructive behaviours and  
4837 he is sort of a lot more mature in his way of thinking really, thinking of like  
4838 the long term I want to get a good job, so I need to behave in school... One of  
4839 the students had an award actually before Christmas for most improved  
4840 behaviour, he was landed [happy].



4841 It should be noted that of those eight students, one of the students moved schools due  
 4842 to family circumstances and subsequent re-location. The corresponding CMO  
 4843 Configuration is presented in Table 5.14.

4844 **Table 5.14**

4845 *CMO Configuration 7.1: Sustained Improvements in Self-esteem, Attitude, and*  
 4846 *Behaviour*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
For students who experienced low self-esteem and disengagement towards school (e.g., limited involvement and poor conduct during academic activities), and less chaotic home environments.	The resources of the programme had enough leverage to sustain the reaction of improved self-esteem, attitude, and behaviour over time.	Students described how TACKLE had contributed to increased self-esteem, allowing them to feel more confident communicating in front of their peers. Others described improvements in their attitude, perspectives, and behaviour, including how they regulate their emotions, and their attitude towards the future.	Improved engagement, behaviour, and psychosocial outcomes during curriculum lessons.

4847 **5.3.7.2 CMO Configuration 7.2: A Lack of Sustainment, Reversion, and**  
 4848 **a Regressed State.** For four students facing an extremely chaotic home environment  
 4849 and difficult circumstances (e.g., parental separation, parental substance abuse,  
 4850 limited supervision, neglect, and gang affiliations) outside of the school setting  
 4851 (context), the resources provided through TACKLE did not have sufficient leverage  
 4852 to sustain improvements in students' self-esteem, attitude, and behaviour. Within  
 4853 such contexts, students described an increase in behaviour-related issues, difficulties  
 4854 concentrating in lessons, and associations with older, deviant peers (mechanism).  
 4855 Outcomes observed included poor school attendance, exclusions, entrenched feelings  
 4856 of disaffection towards school, and alternative learning arrangements.

4857 Brayden, Ellis, Isaac, and Harrison described difficult family circumstances,  
 4858 including parental separation, parental substance abuse, housing instability, limited  
 4859 supervision, neglect, and gang affiliations that had negatively impacted upon them  
 4860 within the school setting. The following extract from one student<sup>8</sup> provides some  
 4861 indication of the complexities and instabilities of their lives (3-month interview):

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<sup>8</sup> Due to the sensitive information provided, no pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the students.

4862 We always lived with [my parent] then a big thing happened and then I lived  
 4863 with my uncle. My eight-year-old brother lives back with [my parent] now,  
 4864 but I don't bother [with] them. My fourteen-year-old sister lives with my nan  
 4865 and then my two baby brothers and big sister's in foster care, and also my  
 4866 new baby sister is.

4867 Poignantly, one of the student's stated: "I haven't talked to [my parent] in like a  
 4868 year... I got a bit lost, lost track a bit in school, like my attitude and behaviour. I  
 4869 wasn't really myself for like a, like a long time" (10-month interview). While another  
 4870 student also commented: "I've had stuff happening in my family recently and in the  
 4871 house, so I haven't been concentrating in class" (3-month interview). Overall, it was  
 4872 evident that family circumstances impacted upon students' school attendance, as one  
 4873 student simply stated: "When something bad happens at home, I stay off [school]"  
 4874 (6-month interview).

4875 For others, changing residence several times during the same term had led to  
 4876 disruptions in their education. For example, one student discussed how he was  
 4877 unable to revise for his exams: "The exams go towards your sets, for like Science,  
 4878 English, and Maths... I couldn't revise for them 'cause I was off school for a while  
 4879 'cause I moved house three times" (6-month interview). A few, including students  
 4880 Ellis and Isaac, described how the end of the TACKLE programme had impacted  
 4881 negatively upon their motivation to behave in school: "I think if I haven't got  
 4882 anything coming up where I go to, like TACKLE and the trips and stuff, then I'm not  
 4883 going to try as I'll never be as good" (Ellis, 6-month interview) and "I was good in  
 4884 class when I could go to TACKLE but if there's nothing to go to then I won't be  
 4885 good 'cause well I just don't want to be [good]. Schools the most boringest thing I've  
 4886 ever done in my life (Isaac, 6-month interview)."

4887 In a number of instances, students explained that they had limited parental  
 4888 supervision and guidance: "My parents let me do anything really, [they're] not strict  
 4889 at all" (6-month interview). Likewise, another student said (10-month interview):

4890 My [parent] works from six in the morning until ten at night... I don't usually  
 4891 go home after school. I only go home in the night. I go out straightaway to  
 4892 [name of area] and then just hang around down there. Then when I get home  
 4893 later, my [parent] sends me back out to the chippy [a chip shop].

4894 A teacher described the impact that limited parental support had on students, sharing:

4895 Their parents do not push them into school. They're not supportive of school,  
4896 not reinforcing consequences, and not doing homework with them and things  
4897 like that, so, no push and support from home is just a huge barrier...

4898 Everything is impacted by external things and when programmes are no  
4899 longer in place, all this other stuff is still going on or has happened since (6-  
4900 month interview).

4901 With limited parental guidance and supervision, and no access to TACKLE,  
4902 some students expressed feelings of abandonment, disappointment, and loneliness,  
4903 such as: "I wish I was doing TACKLE now. 'Cause I don't really have anyone to  
4904 speak to now. I was disappointed when it [the programme] finished like but erm,  
4905 talking to [TACKLE facilitators] like once a month or something could help" (6-  
4906 month interview). While other students had started to associate with older peers  
4907 outside of school which, in turn, had contributed to an increase in disruptive and  
4908 maladaptive behaviours (3-month interview):

4909 I'm worse now than I was ... because outside of school I am hanging around  
4910 with like, older boy's, they're like 18, 17... On the summer holidays,  
4911 basically I was hanging around with them and they're chopsy [loud] people.  
4912 And if someone chops us, we'll chops them back, and now, I just got it from  
4913 them. So, when a teacher says something to me nasty, I just chops back and  
4914 don't stop chopping... I'm on my last warning, they [parents and teachers]  
4915 said that they dunno what to do with me anymore.

4916 In the context of friendships with older peers, a student discussed how he had  
4917 consequently gained access to drugs and affiliations with gangs (6-month interview):

4918 They [my friends] all smoke the green [marijuana] and everything they do.  
4919 One of my friend's mums a [drug] dealer, it's class... I've holded like acid  
4920 tabs [tablets] and stuff, holded them but I've never done them. One of the  
4921 boy's did them and he passed out, he was like, on the floor, he went to  
4922 hospital, he had like this bad trip and everything... I want to go to [name of  
4923 city], there's like all knife crimes and stuff like that innit? I would go with all  
4924 the boys' and see if our group is bigger than theirs like... We have got quite a  
4925 few of us, there's like 50 of us. We have like massive vans and stuff.

4926 The four students (Brayden, Ellis, Isaac, and Harrison) for whom the outcomes of  
4927 TACKLE did not appear to be sustained were in very different situations at the end

4928 of the 10-month follow-up. A teacher explained these students' situations (10-month  
4929 interview):

4930 He [one of the students] is permanently excluded now, just for complete  
4931 disruption, really bad, continually not following instructions... One of the  
4932 student's had to move schools [due to family circumstances] so, he's no  
4933 longer with us... For [student], it's kind of got to that stage now, he's got like  
4934 the most behaviour points in the school. We've had parents in, you know,  
4935 we're trying like kind of referrals, youth work referrals, throwing everything  
4936 at him now to try and keep him. We are even looking at doing like a reduced  
4937 timetable for him. So, maybe he comes here [to school] for a couple of hours  
4938 then goes to work somewhere else for a couple of hours, like in industry. But  
4939 nothings, it's in the pipeline, nothings been organised yet... For [student], he's  
4940 taking part in a [sport programme] two hours a week, so, it's regular.  
4941 Obviously, it's not always sort of, how we sustain that [programme] with  
4942 funding or do you know like people's workloads and stuff like that... There's  
4943 been emotional literacy support [ELSA] which is looking at their strengths,  
4944 what's important to them sort of, looking at their achievements to try and  
4945 raise their self-esteem, someone showing an interest in them... The  
4946 programmes helping him a lot, and he's actually engaging really well with it.

4947 Interestingly, despite there not appearing to be continuing positive impacts on  
4948 engagement or behaviour, due to involvement in the TACKLE programme, it was  
4949 evident that the one of the students was more willing to receive one-to-one support  
4950 and to participate in other school-based programmes as a result of the positive  
4951 experiences he encountered during TACKLE. He shared: "I think the TACKLE  
4952 project helped me speak better to adults and try different things in school" (6-month  
4953 interview).

4954 This CMO Configuration is presented in Table 5.15.

4955 **Table 5.15**4956 *CMO Configuration 7.2: A Lack of Sustainment, Reversion, and a Regressed State*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Students experienced an extremely chaotic home environment and difficult circumstances (e.g., parental separation, parental substance abuse, housing instability, limited parental supervision, neglect, and gang affiliations) outside of the school setting.	The resources of the programme did not have enough leverage to sustain improvements in students' self-esteem, attitude, and behaviour over time.	Attitude and behavioural challenges, difficulties concentrating, feelings of being lost, a lack of motivation/incentive to behave in school and feelings of abandonment, disappointment, and loneliness due to no exposure to TACKLE, and association with older, deviant peers outside of school.	Poor school attendance, exclusions, entrenched feelings of disaffection towards school, and alternative learning arrangements.

4957 **5.3.7.3 Refined Programme Theory 7: Are any Changes sustained? If**  
4958 **not, why not? For whom? In what contexts?** There was evidence to support the  
4959 initial programme theory. Specifically, within the context of students who  
4960 experienced low self-esteem and disengagement towards school (e.g., limited  
4961 involvement and poor conduct during academic activities), and less chaotic home  
4962 environments, the resources of the TACKLE programme had sufficient leverage to  
4963 sustain the reaction of improved self-esteem, attitude, and behaviour over time. In  
4964 turn, this led to improved engagement, behaviour, and psychosocial outcomes during  
4965 curriculum lessons.

4966 However, in the context of students who experienced an extremely chaotic  
4967 home environment and difficult circumstances (e.g., parental separation, parental  
4968 substance abuse, housing instability, limited parental supervision, neglect, and gang  
4969 affiliations) outside of the school setting, the resources of TACKLE did not have  
4970 enough leverage to maintain improvements in students' self-esteem, attitude, and  
4971 behaviour. Hence, the outcomes included poor school attendance, exclusions,  
4972 entrenched feelings of disaffection towards school, and the arrangement of  
4973 alternative learning provisions. Such findings are in alignment with previous research  
4974 which underscore the erosion of programme effects over time as a result of the chaos  
4975 and instabilities students encounter outside of the education context (Bloom, 2010).

4976 **5.4 Discussion: How did TACKLE work, for whom and under which**  
4977 **circumstances?**

4978           The aim of this realist evaluation was to examine the short and long-term  
4979 effects of a condensed version of the TACKLE programme on the engagement,  
4980 behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes of disengaged students aged 12-13 years.  
4981 Based on the findings, it was evident that a condensed multi-component programme  
4982 can lead to favourable engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes among  
4983 early secondary school disengaged students. However, the evaluation identified  
4984 numerous contextual factors and mechanisms that constrained positive  
4985 developmental outcomes. Further, the findings illustrated that the sustainability  
4986 effects of multi-component programmes may be shaped and influenced by  
4987 disengaged students pre-existing contextual circumstances. This section will discuss  
4988 the findings of the evaluation in relation to Chapter 4 (i.e., Study 1), relevant  
4989 literature, and provide practical recommendations for future programme design and  
4990 practice.

4991           In line with the findings from Study 1, important overarching mechanisms  
4992 that enhanced the effectiveness of the TACKLE programme included facilitators  
4993 endorsing a strengths-based ethos, providing students with access to multiple sources  
4994 of support from various role models (e.g., TACKLE facilitators, mentors, teachers,  
4995 and professional athletes), and the provision of financial support and transportation  
4996 to new sporting events (e.g., attendance at professional matches and stadium tours).  
4997 As such, within the context of both younger and older secondary school disengaged  
4998 students, these findings underscore the importance of providing access to a network  
4999 of supportive, close, and nurturing relationships, and new opportunities that may, in  
5000 turn, cultivate desirable engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes among  
5001 disengaged students (Borden & Serido, 2009). However, the findings from the  
5002 current study also revealed new information that enhance understanding of how and  
5003 in which circumstances a 10-week multi-component programme may work within  
5004 the context of disengaged younger students. These unique findings will now be  
5005 explored.

5006           The findings from this evaluation indicated that many disengaged students  
5007 who participated in TACKLE experienced socioeconomic adversity and complex  
5008 family circumstances, and displayed challenges regulating their emotions,  
5009 particularly controlling anger, and responding to conflict. These findings correspond

5010 to previous literature, which suggested that exposure to adversity and negative family  
5011 relationships, may, in turn, lead to emotional regulation and behavioural difficulties  
5012 among students (Evans & English, 2002; Kim et al., 2013; Wang, Vujovic, Barrett,  
5013 & Lerner, 2015). As such, disengaged students may be more likely to experience  
5014 more frequent, intense, negative emotions including anger, frustration, and shame,  
5015 and are in need of emotional regulation strategies (Wang et al., 2015). Similar to  
5016 Morgan, Sibthorp, and Tsethlikai (2016), the findings from this study indicate that  
5017 mentors are uniquely positioned to support the development of emotional regulation  
5018 in disengaged students. Specifically, through mentors listening to students' thoughts  
5019 and feelings, discussing emotions, behaviours, and social relationships, and  
5020 providing guidance regarding emotional regulation strategies, including reappraisal  
5021 (e.g., reinterpreting a teacher's behaviour as caring instead of controlling) and  
5022 suppression (e.g., hiding anger and frustration towards peers) (Wang et al., 2015),  
5023 they were able to help students navigate difficult circumstances and complex social  
5024 relationships. These findings build on previous research that has shown that  
5025 mentoring can be an important mechanism through which students can enhance their  
5026 emotional regulatory skills (Morgan et al., 2016; Wyman et al., 2010), which, in turn,  
5027 may influence academic attainment, school success, and PYD (Rusk et al., 2013;  
5028 Valiente, Swanson, & Eisenberg, 2012; Wang et al., 2015).

5029         However, there were barriers to the development of mentoring relationships,  
5030 which limited their effectiveness for some students. Specifically, in the context of  
5031 students who experienced chaotic home environments and challenging  
5032 circumstances, including, housing instability and caregiving responsibilities for  
5033 younger siblings, students were often unable to articulate their thoughts, feelings, and  
5034 emotions, and were reticent sharing personal aspects of their life with their mentor.  
5035 These results illustrate, in line with Bowlby's (1982) attachment theory and prior  
5036 research (Ahrens et al., 2011; Gauthier et al., 1996; Rhodes, 2002), that when  
5037 students have a history of adversity, neglect, and disorganised relationships, they  
5038 may encounter heightened difficulties forming trusting relationships with others.

5039         In order to help students, develop trusting relationships within this context,  
5040 the current findings point to the importance of the same facilitators delivering each  
5041 programme component (i.e., mentoring, classroom-based workshops, and sport and  
5042 physical activity sessions) to enhance feelings of familiarity and stability. Such  
5043 familiarity, stability, and continuity of the TACKLE facilitators across each

5044 component did, over time, lead to students feeling comfortable around the facilitators  
5045 and subsequently building mutual trust and respect. Furthermore, aligned with  
5046 previous research (Jones & Deutsch, 2011; Moreau et al., 2018; Whitley et al., 2017),  
5047 the results reinforce the importance of students interacting with TACKLE facilitators  
5048 on a first-name basis and facilitators actively participating in the classroom and  
5049 sporting activities alongside students. Collectively, these findings highlight the  
5050 importance of facilitators implementing strategies to establish a culture of trust and  
5051 high-quality personal relationships, particularly among disengaged students with  
5052 histories of complex circumstances.

5053         In the context of students who were passionate about sport but disengaged  
5054 towards academic learning, the findings from this study indicated that utilising  
5055 sporting examples and active pedagogies to teach subjects such as English and  
5056 Mathematics facilitated many students' interaction, enjoyment, and engagement in  
5057 the classroom workshops. This observation is congruent with findings in the  
5058 literature, which have illustrated that curriculum subjects may be more interesting,  
5059 meaningful, and accessible to students when they utilise the language of sport and  
5060 actively involve students in the learning process (Mthethwa, 2007; Robinson, 2012).  
5061 However, unlike the current study, previous research has not focused on disengaged  
5062 students within secondary school settings. As such, these findings extend the  
5063 literature and suggest that in order to help disengaged students move from  
5064 disaffection towards engagement, future programmes should integrate sporting and  
5065 real-life examples into the school curriculum.

5066         Importantly, however, in the current evaluation, as with previous research  
5067 (Andrews & Andrews, 2003; Haudenhuyse et al., 2014), the competitive nature of  
5068 the activities led to a culture of hypermasculinity (i.e., emphasis on strength,  
5069 physicality, competitiveness, toughness, and power) and the emergence of bullying  
5070 among students. Such bullying likely arose because, as other studies have suggested,  
5071 if students do not conform to hegemonic masculine identities, the competitive nature  
5072 of group challenges and activities can result in isolation and exclusion (Bramham,  
5073 2003; Hickey, 2008; Skille & Waddington, 2006). Together, these findings have  
5074 important implications for classroom-based workshops. Specifically, in line with the  
5075 recommendations of other scholars (Jimenez-Barbero et al., 2020), to prevent  
5076 students from engaging in bullying behaviours, facilitators should actively supervise  
5077 activities to ensure positive interaction and engagement between students, establish



5078 an environment that de-emphasises competition and reinforces cooperation, and  
5079 encourage students to display pro-social behaviours and empathy towards others.

5080         Within TACKLE, a number of students shared similar backgrounds and  
5081 behavioural challenges, including disobedience, inattentiveness, verbal aggression,  
5082 and physical violence. Similar to both Cho et al.'s (2005) and Dishion et al.'s (2001)  
5083 results, the findings from this study revealed that by aggregating students with  
5084 similar backgrounds and behavioural challenges, there was an increase and  
5085 enhancement of deviant and disruptive behaviours. These findings are similar to  
5086 those reported in the literature on 'deviancy training' and deviant peer contagion  
5087 (Dishion et al., 1999; Lansford et al., 2020), in that, TACKLE provided disengaged  
5088 students with the opportunity to socialise with other deviant peers. Consequently, it  
5089 became a setting that was conducive to the development of deviant behaviours and  
5090 resulted in a perception between students that such behaviours were desirable and the  
5091 norm.

5092         These findings can be interpreted within dual systems theory (Steinberg,  
5093 2008; 2010). Specifically, this theory suggests that the parts of the brain that respond  
5094 to rewards develop during early adolescence (i.e., aged 10 – 14 years old) (Lansford  
5095 et al., 2020). In contrast, the parts of the brain that are responsible for response  
5096 inhibition, cognitive, and behavioural control develop gradually throughout  
5097 adolescence and early adulthood (Casey, Heller, Gee, & Cohen, 2019; Cohen et al.,  
5098 2016; Steinberg, 2008). As such, when students perceive that their peers are  
5099 accepting of deviant and disruptive behaviours, the rewards in relation to peer  
5100 support and affiliation may outweigh students' capacity to assess risks, evaluate  
5101 consequences, and control their behaviours (Lansford et al., 2020; Rudolph et al.,  
5102 2017). Consequently, concurring with Dishion, Dodge, and Lansford (2006), within  
5103 the context of younger students, the findings from this study support the need for  
5104 experienced facilitators who command authority and respect, effective behaviour  
5105 management strategies, increased supervision and monitoring during activities,  
5106 careful arrangement of pairs and groups (e.g., the separation of students who already  
5107 have deviant affiliations), and the establishment of a pro-social culture that facilitates  
5108 and enforces positive and supportive peer relationships.

5109         In the context of students who experienced frustration and vulnerability when  
5110 they engaged in different sporting activities and challenges, that were outside of their  
5111 comfort zone, the findings from this evaluation strongly support the need for a 'sin-

5112 bin' or time out strategy to enable students' to remove themselves from the situation  
5113 and be able to reflect and recalibrate. Outcomes observed as a result included a  
5114 willingness among students to re-engage with the activity and improved emotional  
5115 regulation. These findings are consistent with and expand upon previous work, which  
5116 has concluded that time out strategies, and places of safety and refuge are  
5117 particularly important for autistic students during periods of anxiety and frustration  
5118 (Goodall, 2018; Parsons et al., 2011). Consequently, in addition to one-to-one  
5119 mentoring, the findings from the current study suggest that, when appropriate time-  
5120 out strategies are integrated, programmes such as TACKLE can play a valuable role  
5121 in helping disengaged students learn to regulate their emotions.

5122         The findings from the longitudinal follow-up highlighted the important role  
5123 of contextual factors in determining whether TACKLE created sustainable and  
5124 lasting favourable engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes among  
5125 disengaged year 8 students. Specifically, there was evidence to suggest that in the  
5126 context of students who experienced less chaotic home environments, the resources  
5127 of TACKLE were sufficient to maintain improvements in students' self-esteem,  
5128 attitude, and behaviour. However, a condensed TACKLE programme was not  
5129 sufficient in the long-term to compensate for students who encountered extremely  
5130 chaotic home environments and circumstances, including parental substance abuse,  
5131 limited supervision, neglect, and gang affiliations. These findings reinforce previous  
5132 research (e.g., Bloom, 2010; Magee & Jeanes, 2011; Yates & Payne, 2006) and  
5133 suggest that within the context of heightened complexity and vulnerability,  
5134 programmes such as TACKLE may be able to offer positive experiences and a  
5135 change of routine in the short-term, but they may be unable to produce long-term  
5136 sustainability effects. In this context, in order to alter disengaged students' long-term  
5137 trajectories, they may require multi-component programmes of longer durations and  
5138 intensities (cf. Grossman & Rhodes, 2002).

#### 5139 ***5.4.1 Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions for Research***

5140         The strengths of this realist evaluation include the ability to unpack the  
5141 contextual factors and mechanisms through which a condensed TACKLE  
5142 programme worked among disengaged year 8 students. Specifically, the evaluation  
5143 illustrated how differences in contexts can influence student's engagement with the  
5144 resources of the TACKLE programme and the subsequent outcomes generated. As  
5145 such, by identifying the dynamic interactions between contexts, mechanisms, and

5146 outcomes, the evaluation generated new insights that can be used to inform future  
5147 programme design and innovation.

5148         This study complemented and expanded upon the data collection methods  
5149 used in Chapter 4, demonstrating the value of using the walking interview method  
5150 for disengaged year 8 students. The ‘talk-as-you-walk’ approach helped students to  
5151 feel comfortable, interact more effectively, and to authentically share their own  
5152 complex experiences. Collectively, these findings provide evidence that walking  
5153 interviews can serve as powerful mechanisms in which disengaged students can feel  
5154 empowered and experience higher levels of ownership over the interview setting.

5155         The longitudinal follow-up design allowed for an exploration of students’  
5156 progress and trajectories over a ten-month period. As such, the current study expands  
5157 previous literature by providing insight into how a condensed multi-component  
5158 programme impacted students’ engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes  
5159 over time. Further, the longitudinal design sheds light on the contextual  
5160 circumstances of disengaged students that may prevent programmes from having  
5161 long-term sustainability effects. Accordingly, future research is needed that examines  
5162 the effectiveness of multi-component programmes that provide disengaged students  
5163 with additional resources and follow-up support. Further, future studies should also  
5164 aim to establish how multi-component programmes may work for disengaged  
5165 populations outside of the school setting.

5166         There were also some limitations that should be noted. Firstly, in contrast to  
5167 Chapter 4, work-based placements were not included in this programme due to the  
5168 age and developmental stage of the students. However, based on the findings, it was  
5169 evident that students were able to engage in discussions regarding their future and  
5170 post-school transitions. As such, within the context of disengaged year 8 students, the  
5171 inclusion of work-based placements may have served as an effective engagement  
5172 tool. Although, future research is required to evaluate the impact of work-based  
5173 placements among younger disengaged students. Secondly, two students dropped out  
5174 of the longitudinal follow-up at the second time point (six-month) and consequently,  
5175 a detailed understanding of the long-term impact of TACKLE for these students was  
5176 not gained. Additionally, interviews were conducted with students and teachers,  
5177 however, in order to enhance understanding of the important contextual conditions  
5178 and mechanisms, it may have been useful to have conducted realist interviews with  
5179 TACKLE facilitators and to have included them in the process of theory refinement

5180 (cf. Verkooijen et al., 2020). Finally, consistent with Study 1, the TACKLE  
5181 programme was delivered within the school setting and consequently, it remains  
5182 unclear whether the refined programme theories from this study can be transferred to  
5183 disengaged young people who are *outside* of education and employment.

#### 5184 **5.4.2 Conclusion**

5185 In conclusion, this study generates new insight regarding how and in what  
5186 circumstances a condensed TACKLE programme worked for disengaged year 8  
5187 students, and over what duration. These findings expand upon the research conducted  
5188 in Chapter 4, providing an indication of the longevity of the TACKLE programme.  
5189 Collectively, the findings from the evaluation can be used to inform the development  
5190 and design of future programmes working with disengaged younger students.  
5191 However, additional research is warranted to examine the influence of multi-  
5192 component programmes of different durations, intensities, and across different age  
5193 groups and contexts.

## Chapter 6: Study 3

### 5194 **6.1 Introduction**

5195            Chapters 4 and 5 unpacked how, why, for whom, and in what circumstances  
5196 the TACKLE programme impacted disengaged students within school settings.  
5197 Collectively, the findings from both chapters generated new insights regarding the  
5198 contextual factors that need considering and the mechanisms through which  
5199 TACKLE led to desirable and undesirable engagement, behavioural, and  
5200 psychosocial outcomes. However, although the findings from Chapters 4 and 5 add  
5201 to the evidence base regarding what might work for disengaged students *within*  
5202 school settings, there remains a scarcity of research exploring how multi-component  
5203 programmes may work within the context of disengaged young people who are  
5204 *outside* of education, employment, and training (Mawn et al., 2017).

5205            In comparison to disengaged students who are currently attending school,  
5206 disengaged young people who are not in education or employment may be more  
5207 susceptible to developing entrenched (i.e., deeply ingrained and difficult to change)  
5208 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial challenges (e.g., feelings of apathy and  
5209 boredom; substance abuse and criminality, and; hopelessness and suicidal thoughts,  
5210 respectively) (Goldman-Mellor et al., 2016; Gutierrez-Garcia et al., 2018; Nudzor,  
5211 2010). Lengthy periods outside of education and employment may also have  
5212 ‘scarring’ effects on young peoples’ future employment prospects and earning  
5213 potential, and over time, can lead to them becoming (increasingly) detached and  
5214 disconnected from society (Carcillo, Fernandez, Konigs, & Minea, 2015). Given  
5215 such substantial and sustained negative consequences, there is an urgent need to  
5216 implement effective programmes to help disengaged young people re-engage in  
5217 education or employment settings. Specifically, there is a need to develop and  
5218 evaluate programmes aimed at enhancing disengaged young peoples’ engagement,  
5219 behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes which, in turn, may support and facilitate  
5220 their re-engagement.

5221            To enhance the effectiveness of programmes with disengaged young people,  
5222 substantial evidence highlights the importance of ensuring young people are actively  
5223 involved in co-designing their own programmes and activities (Enright &  
5224 O’Sullivan, 2010; Sullivan, Saito, & Chamberlain, 2018). When young people are  
5225 involved in the design and development of programmes, they may be more likely to  
5226 engage with the programme and experience feelings of empowerment, leadership,

5227 agency, and purpose (Powers & Tiffany, 2006; Serido, Borden, & Perkins, 2011;  
5228 Sullivan et al., 2018). To this end, the aim of the current study was to conduct a  
5229 realist evaluation to understand how, and under which circumstances a *youth-driven*  
5230 multi-component programme (i.e., the EMPOWER programme) may impact  
5231 disengaged young peoples' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes.  
5232 The realist evaluation was guided by the following questions:

- 5233 1. How, why, for whom, and in what contexts does the EMPOWER programme  
5234 impact (if at all) disengaged young peoples' engagement, behavioural, and  
5235 psychosocial outcomes?
- 5236 2. What are the underpinning mechanisms explaining the impact (if any) of the  
5237 EMPOWER programme?

## 5238 **6.2 Method**

### 5239 **6.2.1 Methodology**

5240 Recognising the importance of young people having a voice throughout the  
5241 development and implementation of programmes (Christens & Dolan, 2011; Whitley  
5242 et al., 2017), as well as the benefits identified in Chapters 4 and 5 of utilising a  
5243 strengths-based approach when working with disengaged young people, this study  
5244 applied appreciative inquiry as a guiding theoretical framework to inform the  
5245 development of initial programme theories and the co-construction of the  
5246 EMPOWER programme. In line with Chapters 4 and 5, this co-designed programme  
5247 was evaluated using realist principles.

5248 **6.2.1.1 Appreciative Inquiry.** Appreciative inquiry is a form of participatory  
5249 action research based on positive psychology (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros,  
5250 2008; Seligman, 2002). The approach comprises a strengths-based framework that  
5251 aims to facilitate positive change by discovering and elevating young peoples' assets,  
5252 successes, hopes, and dreams (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom,  
5253 2010). This strengths-based framework shifts away from traditional problem-focused  
5254 orientations by seeking to identify: 'what is working, why is it working, and what  
5255 could be in the future?' (Gray, Treacy, & Hall, 2019; Kadi-Hanifi et al., 2014).  
5256 Appreciative inquiry is, therefore, grounded in the assumption that there is always  
5257 something that is working effectively within young people's' lives, regardless of the  
5258 challenges they may be experiencing (Horn & Govender, 2019; Lewis & Emil,  
5259 2010). According to Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010), appreciative inquiry is  
5260 underpinned by eight core principles:

- 5261 1. The Constructionist Principle: A young persons' reality is shaped  
 5262 according to their beliefs, interpretations, and perceptions.
- 5263 2. The Simultaneity Principle: The process of inquiry and asking questions  
 5264 about young peoples' strengths, hopes, dreams, and aspirations stimulates  
 5265 young people's' curiosity, creativity, and imagination, which, in turn,  
 5266 generates change (Cojocaru, 2010).
- 5267 3. The Poetic Principle: The language used, stories shared, and the topic of  
 5268 inquiry act as sources of inspiration. Questions around strengths and  
 5269 potentialities trigger feelings of hope and excitement, whereas questions  
 5270 around deficits and problems activate feelings of worry and stress.
- 5271 4. The Anticipatory Principle: "The future we anticipate is the future we  
 5272 create" (Bagshaw, 2003, p. 25). Positive visualisations of the future can  
 5273 inspire action and execution.
- 5274 5. The Positive Principle: Successful change requires hope, positive  
 5275 emotions, social bonding, and connection.
- 5276 6. The Wholeness Principle: By engaging a diversity of stakeholders in the  
 5277 process of change (e.g., young people and facilitators), individual  
 5278 differences can be understood and celebrated, and new discoveries can be  
 5279 made (Ludema & Fry, 2008).
- 5280 7. The Enactment Principle: Transformation occurs when young people  
 5281 have a clear vision of their desired future. This desired future is created  
 5282 by young peoples' thoughts, words, actions, and behaviours in the present  
 5283 (Friedman, 2011).
- 5284 8. The Free-Choice Principle: The quality of a young persons' engagement  
 5285 and commitment is enhanced when they have the freedom to decide how  
 5286 they would like to be involved.

5287 The current study was guided by these core principles. Specifically, the programme  
 5288 was grounded in young peoples' innate strengths, attributes, and virtues. Throughout  
 5289 the study, young people were involved in constructing knowledge by sharing their  
 5290 own ideas, beliefs, and interpretations, and were collaborators in the overall design  
 5291 and implementation of the programme. Further, by providing opportunities for young  
 5292 people to develop a vision of their desired future, this, in turn, initiated positive  
 5293 change and led to an atmosphere of empowerment. Overall, the young people were

5294 actively involved in the research process and an environment was established where  
5295 they felt listened to, valued, and appreciated (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2009).

5296 **6.2.1.2 Integrating Appreciative Inquiry and Realist Evaluation.** The  
5297 design of the EMPOWER programme and the development of initial programme  
5298 theories required for the realist evaluation, was guided by the appreciative 4-D cycle:  
5299 Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny (Cooperrider et al., 2008). The 4-D cycle  
5300 comprised:

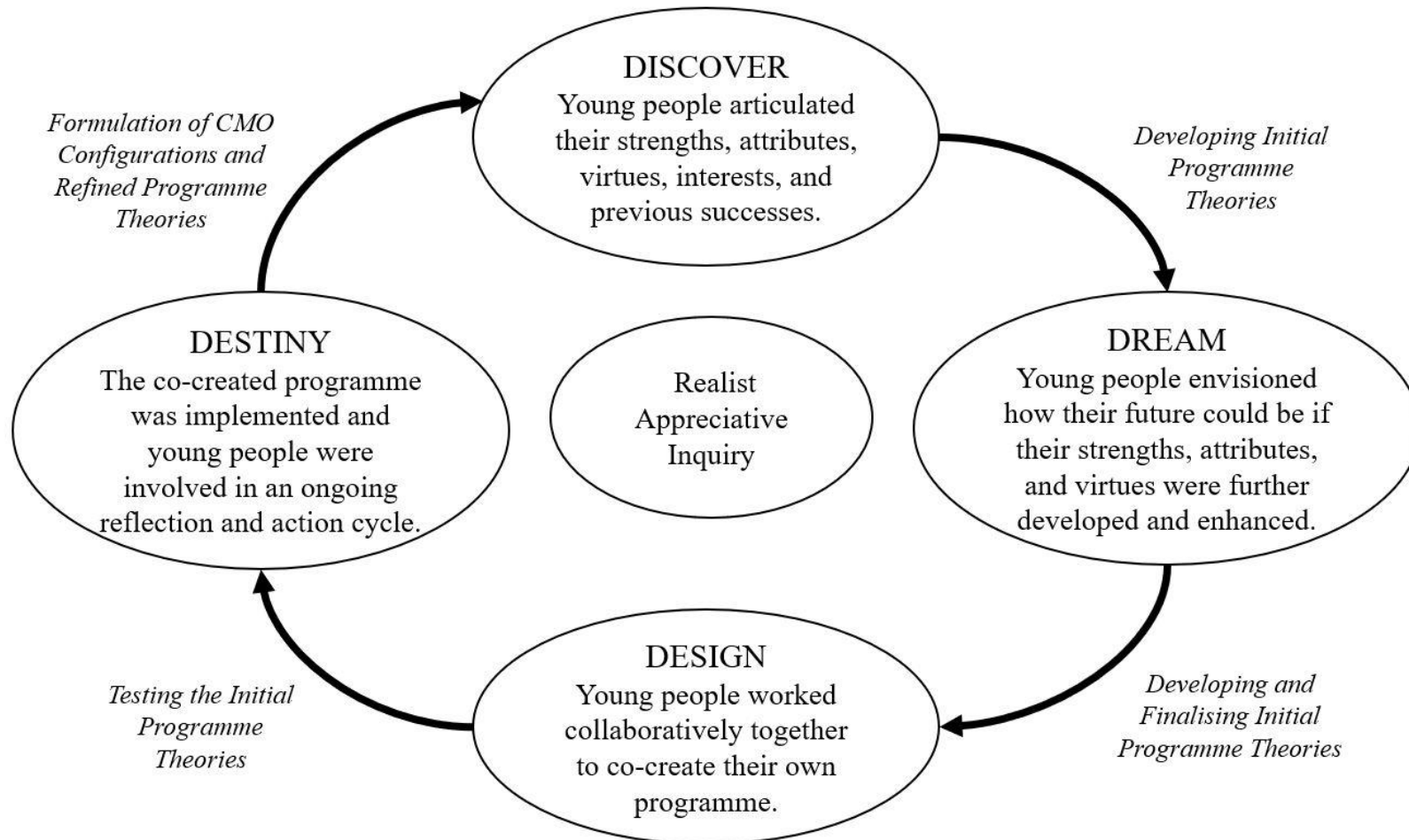
- 5301 1. Discover: Through informal discussions and storytelling, young people  
5302 articulated their strengths, attributes, virtues, interests, and previous  
5303 successes. Specifically, they shared experiences from their education,  
5304 employment, and personal lives where they felt most engaged,  
5305 passionate, confident, and committed (Carter, Cummings, & Cooper  
5306 2007).
- 5307 2. Dream: This phase included young people envisioning how their future  
5308 could be if their strengths, attributes, and virtues were further developed  
5309 and enhanced (Carter et al., 2007). Through several creative activities  
5310 and tasks, young people engaged in discussions about their desired  
5311 futures (Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003).
- 5312 3. Design: Young people worked collaboratively together to co-create their  
5313 own programme, designing activities and strategies that enabled them to  
5314 further identify and nurture their strengths, attributes, and virtues.
- 5315 4. Destiny: During this phase, the EMPOWER programme was  
5316 implemented and young people continuously reflected on their progress.  
5317 Activities were adjusted and new objectives created based on this  
5318 reflection.

5319 These stages were integrated within a realist evaluation framework (see figure 6.1).  
5320 Specifically, the Discover, Dream, and Design stages of appreciative inquiry were  
5321 used to inform the development of initial programme theories and the overall co-  
5322 design of the EMPOWER programme. During the Destiny phase, the initial  
5323 programme theories were refined and context, mechanism, outcome configurations  
5324 were formulated that illustrated how and under which contexts the EMPOWER  
5325 programme impacted disengaged young peoples' engagement, behavioural, and  
5326 psychosocial outcomes. These stages are explained in more detail in section 6.2.5.



5327 **Figure 6.1**

5328 *The Realist Evaluation and 4-D Cycle (Adapted from Cooperrider et al., 2008).*



### 5329 **6.2.2 Setting**

5330 The context for this evaluation was a small town in the South West of Wales.  
5331 The town is situated in a low-socioeconomic area with a high percentage of young  
5332 people who have low academic attainment and who are in many instances  
5333 economically inactive (Carcillo et al., 2015; Welsh Government, 2019). In two of its  
5334 three secondary schools, the number of students eligible for free school meals  
5335 exceeds the national average, and there is a high proportion of students who have  
5336 been suspended and/or expelled from school (Estyn, 2020). Additionally, according  
5337 to data from the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, the town has remained within  
5338 the top 50 areas for deep-rooted deprivation in the past fifteen years and has some of  
5339 the highest deprivation rates for employment, income, health, education, and  
5340 community safety in Wales (Welsh Government, 2019).

### 5341 **6.2.3 Participants and Recruitment**

5342 Inclusion criteria for involvement in the study were young people between  
5343 the ages of 16 and 24 years old who had not participated in any form of education,  
5344 employment, or training for a minimum six-month period. The recruitment of young  
5345 people took place over the course of six-months through two different routes. First,  
5346 prior to implementation of the EMPOWER programme, I spent one day a week (six  
5347 or more hours a day) for six-months in the company of disengaged young people  
5348 who were participating in another programme. During this period, I engaged with the  
5349 young people in a number of creative classroom activities, sports, and practical  
5350 games (e.g., pretzels, minefield, use it or lose it, tunnel ball plus; see Hanrahan &  
5351 Carlson, 2000). This time was invaluable because it helped me to gain participants'  
5352 trust, rapport, and respect, something which is critical when conducting research with  
5353 vulnerable and marginalised populations (Liamputtong, 2007; Magee & Jeanes,  
5354 2011). Many of the young people I had been engaging with enthusiastically agreed to  
5355 participate in the EMPOWER programme.

5356 Secondly, I spent a considerable amount of time attending the Job Centre and  
5357 contacting youth workers in order to establish opportunities to meet and interact with  
5358 disengaged young people. Once I had opportunities to interact with young people, I  
5359 promoted the programme via flyers, videos, and presentations. In total, over the  
5360 sixth-month period, a purposive sample of eleven young people between 17 and 23  
5361 years old participated in the current programme and study evaluation (Mean age = 19  
5362 years of age,  $SD = 2.8$ ). Of the young people, nine were male and two were female.

5363 **6.2.4 Procedure**

5364 Following ethical approval from the University's Ethics Committee (2018-  
5365 100) and the period of being embedded with young people, I began the process of  
5366 recruitment for this programme and evaluation study. To do this, I provided young  
5367 people (either at the Job Centre or the alternative programme in which I was  
5368 engaged) with a verbal explanation of the programme and the study. Importantly, I  
5369 made it clear to young people that they could take part in the programme without  
5370 participating in the evaluation study. That is, the young people could decline to take  
5371 part in the evaluation without it affecting their involvement in the programme. After  
5372 an initial discussion, I provided each young person with an information sheet that  
5373 provided further details of the evaluation and distributed consent forms. All young  
5374 people who chose to take part in the programme also provided informed written and  
5375 verbal consent to participate in the evaluation study.

5376 **6.2.5 Procedure: Programme Design and Evaluation**

5377 As detailed above, the programme was co-constructed with, and for,  
5378 disengaged young people drawing upon the principles of appreciative inquiry.  
5379 During this process, the initial programme theories were also developed (phase one  
5380 of realist evaluation). Subsequently, the programme was implemented, and the initial  
5381 programme theories were tested (phase two of realist evaluation). Finally, refined  
5382 programme theories and CMO configurations were formulated (phase three of realist  
5383 evaluation).

5384 **6.2.5.1 Phase One: Development of the Programme and Initial**  
5385 **Programme Theories.**

5386 **6.2.5.1.1 Developing the EMPOWER Programme.** To develop EMPOWER,  
5387 I spent a day each week for a period of six-months interacting with disengaged  
5388 young people. During this period, I established caring, trusting relationships with the  
5389 young people who were going to engage with my programme. I also developed a  
5390 contextual understanding of young peoples' lives, including, their backgrounds,  
5391 interests, strengths, hopes, dreams, and aspirations. Such insights were influential in  
5392 helping to underpin the development of the EMPOWER programme. Specifically,  
5393 the development of EMPOWER had four phases.

5394 In the first phase (Discover), I aimed to understand young peoples' strengths,  
5395 attributes, virtues, interests, and previous successes. To do this, I used informal  
5396 discussions and storytelling as tools to engage young people. In groups of five to six

5397 young people, I used the following questions as a guide to stimulate discussion:  
 5398 “what attributes and virtues do you value most about yourself?”, “Can you describe a  
 5399 time in your education, employment, or personal lives where you felt most engaged,  
 5400 passionate, and confident?”, “What did you do to make that happen?” and “what  
 5401 were you most proud of?”. The young people organised their answers on large sheets  
 5402 of paper which were then summarised on to the whiteboard. Examples of answers  
 5403 provided by the young people from this phase included:

- 5404 • “Kindness is such an important attribute of mine and value because the way  
 5405 you act or something you say can affect someone long-term. Being kind can  
 5406 make someone’s day, also, doing good acts of kindness at someone, or even  
 5407 something as small as smiling at someone can make not only them but yourself  
 5408 feel very positive.”
- 5409 • “In my community, I help out with the carnival. I am on the committee and  
 5410 organise the event with old people. That is a passion for me ‘cause I get to help  
 5411 other people.”
- 5412 • “My strength is my determination and willpower. It’s important to me to be  
 5413 able to say no because of the environment where I’m from.”
- 5414 • “I value my determination because I want to be able to earn money for myself  
 5415 and not live of anyone else. I feel it’s better to have a good career ‘cause you’ll  
 5416 enjoy life more. I’m proud of myself because I keep looking for a job.”
- 5417 • “I feel confident when I am told someone is proud of me.”
- 5418 • “I’m proud of myself when I help others.”
- 5419 • “I have good timekeeping skills. I’m always on time and sometimes earlier.  
 5420 I’m very prepared, I’ll always turn up somewhere with everything I need and  
 5421 more.”
- 5422 • “I feel most engaged when I’m on stage. I have 2 years of experience with  
 5423 performing arts and I’ve been in 4-5 shows held by the college.”
- 5424 • “I think I am great at being on time and I feel proud when I win a game of  
 5425 rugby because I know I did my best.”

5426 Overall, based on the group discussion and young peoples’ writing, I identified four  
 5427 predominant themes: the importance of kindness, a recognition and enactment of  
 5428 helping behaviours, determination to succeed, and a desire to make themselves and  
 5429 others proud.

5430 During the second phase (Dream), in small groups, I asked young people to  
 5431 reflect on ‘what could be’. Specifically, young people were encouraged to envision  
 5432 how their future could be if their strengths, attributes, and virtues were elevated.  
 5433 Additionally, young people discussed the strengths and attributes they would like to  
 5434 improve in order for their desired future to be created. These answers were written on  
 5435 post-it notes and displayed on the whiteboard. Examples of young peoples’ responses  
 5436 during this phase were:

- 5437 • “If I was a bit more confident then I could get a job where I help more people  
 5438 and organise more events in my community.”
- 5439 • “In the future, if I got more confident then I could be on stage and work in the  
 5440 performing arts. I’d need to stop doubting myself and believe that I could do  
 5441 it.”
- 5442 • “I am interested in a job in construction. I would need confidence and good  
 5443 communication to work with new people.”
- 5444 • “I want to do stuff that is outside of my comfort zone, gain confidence, new  
 5445 experiences, and team-building stuff.”
- 5446 • “I’d like to boost my confidence and skills so I can work with children in the  
 5447 future.”
- 5448 • “I want to be someone who never gives up.”
- 5449 • “I would like to gain work experience and be able to get a good paying job in  
 5450 the future.”
- 5451 • “I would like to exercise more often and be more confident in myself work  
 5452 wise.”
- 5453 • “I would like to have better relationships with my family and have a job that  
 5454 gives me a reason to get out of bed.”

5455 Collectively, based on the young peoples’ ideas, the following themes were  
 5456 identified: A desire to enhance self-confidence, self-belief, and resilience, a need to  
 5457 escape their comfort zone, and the opportunity to accumulate meaningful work  
 5458 experience.

5459 In the final phases (Design and Destiny), young people were involved in  
 5460 working collaboratively with me to co-create the EMPOWER programme. These  
 5461 phases comprised young people researching activities on the computers and sharing  
 5462 ideas with the group. Help and support were provided to young people through

5463 questions including, “who is going to deliver that activity?”, “what equipment do you  
5464 think we would need?”, and “who do you think we could ask for help?”. Young  
5465 people were asked to provide rationales and justifications for different activities. In  
5466 doing so, young people focused on activities that would enable them to develop their  
5467 strengths and attributes and bring them closer towards their desired futures. During  
5468 the Destiny phase, the EMPOWER programme was implemented and young people  
5469 were involved in an ongoing reflection and action cycle, adjusting activities, and  
5470 establishing new objectives. Examples of young peoples’ feedback from these phases  
5471 included:

- 5472 • “I would like to do classroom activities that teach me to stop thinking  
5473 negatively about myself because I think that will give me confidence to then  
5474 try new things.”
- 5475 • “I’d like to learn more about my skills through different types of sports and  
5476 work experiences.”
- 5477 • “It would be good to do activities in the nature because we are part of nature  
5478 and if you respect nature, nature will respect you.”
- 5479 • “I’d like to learn about different employment jobs so I can understand what  
5480 they are actually like. I’d also like to see what a university is like.”
- 5481 • “I’d like to do sports that are outside of my comfort zone and not give up when  
5482 it gets hard, like rock climbing.”
- 5483 • “I want to do stuff that makes me stronger mentally so that I don’t let small  
5484 things get to me.”
- 5485 • “I’d like to volunteer working with children and experience different job  
5486 roles.”
- 5487 • “It would be good to practice interviews and to do interview prep because I’ve  
5488 never had any interviews before.”
- 5489 • “I want to continue to do things that are outside of my comfort zone in the  
5490 outdoors.”
- 5491 • “I want to do rugby, football, and basketball, to help me communicate better  
5492 and get to know new people.”
- 5493 • “I just want to keep developing my confidence by being able to speak to  
5494 different types of people.”

5495 Based on these discussions with young people, it was collaboratively confirmed  
5496 throughout the Design and Destiny phases, that the programme needed to incorporate  
5497 positive psychology and strengths-focused activities, sport, and outdoor adventure  
5498 activities to enhance young peoples' psychological resources (e.g., self-confidence,  
5499 self-belief, resilience, and coping skills), and work-based placements to offer  
5500 exposure to a diversity of occupations.

5501           Consequently, the resultant EMPOWER programme developed was a youth-  
5502 driven multi-component programme which aimed to enhance disengaged young  
5503 peoples' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes through its four-  
5504 week, twelve-day project. The programme comprised a combination of positive  
5505 psychology and strengths-focused workshops, sport, physical activity, and outdoor  
5506 adventure experiences, and work-based placements. I delivered the programme,  
5507 acting as the young peoples' classroom educator and sports coach. There were also  
5508 additional facilitators including outdoor adventure instructors and work-based  
5509 placement providers. The key elements of the EMPOWER programme are detailed  
5510 in Table 6.1.

**Table 6.1**5511 *Overview of the EMPOWER Programme*

<b>Modality and number of hours:</b>	<b>Aim of each modality:</b>	<b>Topics covered/Activities:</b>
Positive Psychology and Strengths-Focused Workshops: 20 hours	To help young people discover and refine their strengths, assets, virtues, and capacities (Quinlan et al., 2012).	Self-esteem and kindness/empathy journals, thought journals, role play scenarios, signature and character strengths, healthy lifestyles, counting blessings, gratitude letters, goal setting and goal striving, visualising one's best possible self, replaying and writing about positive experiences, challenging negative self-talk, emotional regulation and coping strategies.
Sport, Physical Activity, and Outdoor Adventure Experiences: 24 hours	To enhance young peoples' self-esteem, self-perceptions, leadership and teamwork skills, resilience, and emotional regulation, leading to improved relationships with their peers (Garst, Scheider, & Baker, 2001).	Rock and tree climbing, wood carving, orienteering, cooking on the fire, woodland activities, problem solving games (e.g., spiders web, round robin), dodgeball, badminton, football, rugby, basketball, fitness circuits, and practical games such as electric fence, tunnel ball plus, pretzels, and minefield (see Hanrahan & Carlson, 2000).
Work-Based Placements/Preparation: 24 hours	To allow young people to gain experience working, raise awareness of employment opportunities, and provide exposure to a diversity of occupations.	Refereeing/officiating at rugby camps and festivals, sports coaching, and looking after younger children, construction work, university campus visit, student life talks, sport, exercise, and engineering tours, technology, engineering, and mathematics activities, and a mock interview event in which young people were interviewed by sport organisations, videographers, dance choreographers, apprenticeship/traineeship co-ordinators, university, and college educators.

5512 **6.2.5.1.2 Developing Initial Programme Theories.** Throughout the process of  
5513 co-constructing the EMPOWER programme, the initial programme theories were  
5514 informed by group discussions with young people, the findings from Study 1 and 2  
5515 (see Chapters 4 and 5), and engagement with the broader literature. Specifically,  
5516 once the ideas about programme activities and components were finalised, I engaged  
5517 young people in discussions regarding how they anticipated each activity and  
5518 component to bring about change. Examples of questions included: "outdoor



5519 adventure activities may provide a range of different benefits, including, increased  
5520 independence, resilience, and competence, how do you think these activities may  
5521 work for you?”, and “work-based placements may help you to develop important  
5522 skills and behaviours needed to secure employment, what type of skills and  
5523 behaviours do you think are important to develop?”. These questions and discussions  
5524 were informed by findings from Study 1, Study 2, and the positive psychology and  
5525 strengths-based, work-based placements, sport, and outdoor adventure literature  
5526 (e.g., Hermens et al., 2017; Nelson & O’Donnell, 2012; Norton & Watt, 2014;  
5527 Quinlan et al., 2012). Collectively, through these processes, several initial  
5528 programme theories were developed examining the mechanisms through which the  
5529 EMPOWER programme may contribute to positive engagement, behavioural, and  
5530 psychosocial outcomes among disengaged young people.

5531 **6.2.5.2 Phase Two: Testing the Initial Programme Theories.** The initial  
5532 programme theories were tested and scrutinised in order to understand the impact of  
5533 the EMPOWER programme on young peoples’ developmental outcomes. For this  
5534 study, a combination of participant observation, field notes, group reflections, and  
5535 one-to-one interviews were carried out with young people over a four-week period.

5536 **6.2.5.2.1 Participant Observation and Field Notes.** Concurring with Studies  
5537 1 and 2, I adopted the role of a participant observer and recorded extensive field  
5538 notes during and after the programme. As a participant observer, I spent three days  
5539 per week and a total of sixty-eight hours with young people, over the course of four-  
5540 weeks. Of note, I had already spent a period of six-months working with many of  
5541 these young people in another programme. As such, by the time EMPOWER began,  
5542 I had already got to know the majority of my participants, built trusting relationships,  
5543 and understood their backgrounds and previous education and/or employment  
5544 experiences. Throughout EMPOWER, I delivered positive psychology and strengths-  
5545 based workshops, sport sessions, actively participated in work-based placements and  
5546 outdoor adventure activities, and shared many minibus trips, lunchtime meals, and  
5547 informal discussions with young people. By immersing myself in the setting, I was  
5548 able to develop an in-depth understanding of important contextual factors,  
5549 mechanisms, and the realities of disengaged young peoples’ lives (Merriam &  
5550 Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Over time, the young people considered me to be part  
5551 of their group and I was able to demonstrate that I was genuinely committed to their  
5552 overall development and progress. The field notes described my observations,

5553 interpretations, and experiences, focusing on the physical setting, activities, peer  
 5554 relations, patterns of behaviour, body language, and informal and formal  
 5555 conversations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

5556 **6.2.5.2.2 Group Reflections.** Group reflections with young people happened  
 5557 during and/or after activities, in the most convenient setting (e.g., the activity centre  
 5558 or inside the minibus). Each reflection involved six to eleven young people and  
 5559 averaged twelve to thirty-three minutes ( $M = 25.8$ ,  $SD = 11.7$ ). The intent of the  
 5560 group reflections was to understand young peoples' interpretations of activities and  
 5561 events, and to provide the opportunity for them to interact with each other while  
 5562 sharing their own experiences (Mutha, Takayama, & O'Neil, 1997). In these  
 5563 reflections, I asked young people a series of questions in order to help them articulate  
 5564 their thoughts and perspectives (e.g., "What did you think about the activity?", "Did  
 5565 you learn anything through your involvement in this activity?", and "Has the activity  
 5566 helped you to move forward in any way?"). I took field notes during the reflections  
 5567 to help me interpret and make sense of the young peoples' feedback. Additionally,  
 5568 the reflections were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

5569 **6.2.5.2.3 One-to-One Interviews.** In total, nine interviews<sup>9</sup> were conducted  
 5570 with young people at the end of the programme, either in-person ( $n = 7$ ) or via  
 5571 telephone ( $n = 2$ ). They ranged in length from twenty to fifty-six minutes ( $M = 40.2$ ,  
 5572  $SD = 23.7$ ). In keeping with Study 1 and 2, the interviews initially followed a  
 5573 flexible, open-ended, and semi-structured format to allow young people the  
 5574 opportunity to share their own views of the programme and to discuss aspects of  
 5575 EMPOWER that were most meaningful to them (Galletta, 2013). During this phase,  
 5576 young people described their experiences of each component of the programme (i.e.,  
 5577 positive psychology and strengths-based workshops, sport, physical activity, and  
 5578 outdoor adventure experiences, and work-based placements), the positive and  
 5579 negative elements of the programme, the key things they had learned, the types of  
 5580 relationships formed, and the perceived impact (if any) of the programme on their  
 5581 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes.

5582 Interviews then transitioned into the teacher-learner cycle (see Chapter 3)  
 5583 (Manzano, 2016). Specifically, I re-presented young people with the initial  
 5584 programme theories that we had co-created at the start of the programme. I then

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<sup>9</sup> Two young people did not complete the programme and dropped out of the study during the third week due to newly emerging education and employment opportunities.

5585 encouraged young people to either verify, reject, or modify the initial programme  
5586 theories depending on how each component of the programme had worked in  
5587 practice for them (i.e., refining programme theories) (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). To  
5588 stimulate thinking and discussion, additional support and encouragement were  
5589 provided through probing questions such as, “what was it about the activity that  
5590 made you feel that way?”, “why do you think it worked differently for you?”, and “If  
5591 you could change how the activity was delivered, what would you change?”. All  
5592 interviews were digitally audio-recorded with permission from young people and  
5593 transcribed verbatim.

5594           In an effort to enhance young peoples’ engagement during the one-to-one  
5595 interviews, I showed them photographs to review on my laptop or phone that  
5596 documented their experiences of the EMPOWER programme. Photo-elicitation  
5597 interviews have been shown to actively engage young people in the research process,  
5598 reduce perceived power imbalances between the young person and researcher, aid  
5599 young peoples’ retention, glean emotions, and stimulate more meaningful discussion  
5600 (Banks, 2001; Harper, 2002; Liebenberg et al., 2014; Smith, Gidlow, & Steel, 2012).  
5601 Within this study, the photographs captured young people taking part in a diversity  
5602 of activities (e.g., rock and tree climbing, wood carving, woodland activities, and  
5603 officiating at rugby festivals and camps) and were used as prompts to encourage  
5604 young people to describe in-depth how they felt during the activities and the  
5605 subsequent meanings they had attached to their experiences (Smith et al., 2012).

5606           **6.2.5.3 Phase Three: CMO Configurations and Refined Programme**  
5607 **Theories.** The final phase involved realist data analysis to identify the important  
5608 contextual elements, mechanisms, and outcomes, and to refine programme theories.  
5609 As such, the purpose of this phase was to understand how, why, and under which  
5610 circumstances the EMPOWER programme was effective and its impacts on young  
5611 peoples’ engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes. The one-to-one  
5612 interviews and group reflections were the predominant sources for the establishment  
5613 of CMO configurations. Additionally, participant observations and field notes  
5614 assisted in the process of formulating CMO configurations.

5615           **6.2.5.3.1 Data Analysis.** The data were analysed in congruence with the  
5616 procedures adopted in studies one and two. Specifically, I immersed myself in the  
5617 data by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts, group reflections, and field  
5618 notes multiple times. During this process, audio-recordings were also listened to in

5619 full. The CMO heuristic was then used to code relevant contexts, mechanisms  
5620 (disaggregated into resources and reasoning), and outcomes (Dalkin et al., 2015).  
5621 Contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes were then compared and contrasted against the  
5622 entire data set before they were compiled into summaries, diagrams, and tables.  
5623 Direct quotations from the young people were conceptually matched with each  
5624 element of the CMO configuration. The CMO configuration analysis was reviewed  
5625 by my supervisors.

### 5626 ***6.2.6 Quality and Reporting Standards in Realist Evaluation***

5627 In accordance with studies one and two, this research followed the  
5628 RAMESES II reporting and quality standards (see Greenhalgh et al., 2017; Wong et  
5629 al., 2016).

### 5630 **6.3 Findings**

5631 The following section details the findings of the realist evaluation.  
5632 Specifically, the findings are presented under four initial programme theories that  
5633 were informed by group discussions with young people, findings from Study 1 and 2  
5634 (see Chapters 4 and 5), and engagement with the broader literature. Consistent with  
5635 Studies 1 and 2, each initial programme theory is presented in a box and is followed  
5636 by a description of the theory and information regarding whether it was verified,  
5637 rejected, or modified in light of the data collected. Evidence is then provided  
5638 pertaining to each initial programme theory and important contextual elements,  
5639 mechanisms, and outcomes are identified. The full CMO configurations, which are  
5640 the output of the data collected and intensive fieldwork, are presented in tables.  
5641 Collectively, the CMO configurations and refined programme theories unpack the  
5642 contexts within which the EMPOWER programme was implemented, the  
5643 mechanisms the programme activated, and the impact on young peoples'  
5644 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes.

5645 **6.3.1 Initial Programme Theory 1: Positive Psychology and Strengths-Focused**  
 5646 **Workshops**

Positive psychology and strengths-focused workshops (e.g., sessions focused on self-esteem, kindness, and thought journals, role play scenarios, gratitude letters, signature and character strengths activities, goal setting, and challenging negative self-talk tasks) may enhance young peoples' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes, including their feelings of self-efficacy, self-confidence, self-belief, self-acceptance, optimism, resilience, and coping skills (Govindji & Linley, 2007; Minhas, 2010; Seligman et al., 2009; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Specifically, by supporting and helping young people to understand, discover, and refine their strengths, attributes, virtues, and aspirations, they may, in turn, be able to see themselves as competent and efficacious individuals who have the capacity to re-engage with education or employment opportunities and achieve successful future trajectories (Bandura, 1993; Jones, Destin, & McAdams, 2018).

5647 This initial programme theory suggests that positive psychology and  
 5648 strengths-focused workshops may be a promising approach for enhancing young  
 5649 peoples' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes. There was evidence  
 5650 to support and confirm this programme theory. Specifically, it was evident among  
 5651 the young people that the workshops led to a recognition of their own strengths,  
 5652 assets, and virtues, enhanced feelings of competence, confidence, self-efficacy, and  
 5653 led to an increase in the coping strategies available to effectively manage emotions.  
 5654 These findings are explored in more detail below.

5655 **6.3.1.1 CMO Configuration 1.1: Discovering Strengths, Assets, and**  
 5656 **Virtues.** Many of the young people in this programme had encountered an  
 5657 accumulation of negative education and employment experiences (e.g., bullying,  
 5658 school dropout, low wages, short-term employment contracts, and constant job  
 5659 searches), which, in turn, had led to low self-esteem, self-doubt, and feelings of  
 5660 hopelessness (context). For example, when asked to describe their previous  
 5661 experiences, the young people noted that, "I left my last [college] course because of  
 5662 the stress and bullying, it knocked my confidence... I went into this huge depression  
 5663 state" (Gabrielle<sup>10</sup>), "I dropped out of school, so, no GCSE's... It's impossible for  
 5664 me to get a job, I've tried all of the time, trying to apply for jobs and its impossible  
 5665 cause of my age as well and that" (Connor), and "I had really bad experiences [at  
 5666 work]. Just long hours, like 10 hours a day, shocking pay, and then they just let me  
 5667 go at the end [of the contract]. I was gutted, just thought what's the point?" (Adrian).

<sup>10</sup> Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the participants.

5668           Within this context, the activities (e.g., VIA character strengths survey and  
5669 replaying/writing about positive experiences) provided opportunities for the young  
5670 people to identify and discover their own strengths, assets, and virtues, and to  
5671 positively reflect on the skills they had gained during their education, employment,  
5672 and volunteering experiences (mechanism). Consequently, these activities led to a  
5673 recognition among young people of their own strengths, assets, and virtues  
5674 (mechanism). As explained by Gabrielle: “I know it’s only stuff but it [learning  
5675 about my strengths] means a lot to me. I didn’t know what my strengths and that  
5676 were before doing this programme.” Similarly, Riley shared:

5677           They [activities] made me see my strengths and the types of skills I’ve  
5678 already got through volunteering because well, I’ve volunteered [at charity  
5679 shops] for about 5 years now, so, I’ve ran the shops, I’ve opened and closed  
5680 them, handled cash, re-painted the walls, re-laid floors... So, I’ve got good  
5681 teamwork and communication skills, just through like being around different  
5682 types of people, listening to everyone’s opinions.

5683 Additionally, Harry described:

5684           The classroom stuff did help ‘cause we talked about our strengths on a day-  
5685 to-day basis and I learnt about my leadership skills and that, through helping  
5686 with the carnival, do you know what I mean? Putting up marquees, stages, the  
5687 backs of the marquees, putting crowd barriers up, and erm sort of showing  
5688 people what they’re doing for the day.

5689           Outcomes observed by the young people as a result included enhanced  
5690 feelings of competence and confidence in their own abilities, and a strong sense of  
5691 urgency to act on their strengths and assets. This was illustrated by Charlie, who  
5692 explained: “It [activities] built up my confidence, made me think that I have the skills  
5693 and that now, so, no point in making excuses and wasting time.” Like Charlie, Riley  
5694 also described a strong sense of urgency to act:

5695           I’m ready to look at my strengths differently than when I first started... Just  
5696 giving things a go and not thinking, I should have done this, I should have  
5697 done that... I just need to do it. I’d rather not be on my death bed thinking  
5698 “oh I wish I’d have done this when I was younger.” You see people just  
5699 moaning because they didn’t do anything with their skills. The only person  
5700 who can change that is you.

5701 This CMO configuration is summarised in Table 6.2.

5702 **Table 6.2**5703 *CMO Configuration 1.1: Discovering Strengths, Assets, and Virtues*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Many young people had encountered an accumulation of negative education and employment experiences, which, in turn, had led to low self-esteem, self-doubt, and feelings of hopelessness.	The activities provided opportunities for young people to discover their own strengths, assets, and virtues, and to reflect on the skills they had gained during their education, employment, and volunteering experiences.	This led to a recognition among young people of their own strengths, assets, and virtues.	Enhanced feelings of competence and confidence in their own abilities, and a strong sense of urgency to act on their strengths and assets.

5704 **6.3.1.2 CMO Configuration 1.2: Emotional Regulation and Coping**

5705 **Strategies.** Many young people in EMPOWER experienced challenges regulating  
5706 their thoughts and emotions (context). As evidenced in the following quote by  
5707 Gabrielle:

5708           It's emotions I struggle with... Like, I can flip out one moment and then be  
5709           alright the next. So, I could feel alright but then inside everything will be  
5710           stirring up. Then because I'll start thinking about what's in my head then I'll  
5711           get myself down then.

5712 Throughout the classroom workshops, young people shared their own emotional  
5713 regulation and coping strategies and had the opportunity to receive and learn from  
5714 their peers' feedback (mechanism). For instance, Jordan revealed that: "I tend to  
5715 listen to certain music and tempo beats when I have panic attacks, it calms me down.  
5716 I used to make Lego too," while Josh explained: "I always clean my room, it's good  
5717 for a distraction" and Steffan said: "I look through shopping sites [websites] for ages,  
5718 I find it really calming." Additional examples were shared by Connor who explained:  
5719 "When I'm angry, I just sort of channel it in the gym mostly, box the bag. Getting  
5720 outside helps too mind," and Gabrielle: "I think writing things down or writing  
5721 gratitude letters like we did [in EMPOWER] help 'cause you're forced to focus on  
5722 the things that you're grateful and happy about" (field notes).

5723           For many of the young people, having opportunities to share their own coping  
5724 strategies and experiences with peers led to them feeling heard, supported, and  
5725 recognised by their peers (mechanism). As indicated by Louie: "It was good to learn  
5726 more about each other and be open, [I] liked how we helped each other out with

5727 different things.” This experience was shared by Gabrielle, she described: “I really  
 5728 enjoyed the classroom lessons because we shared things together and listened to each  
 5729 other’s views and opinions, and I built a bond with everyone in the group.”  
 5730 Outcomes evident included the development of close relations within the group and  
 5731 an increase in the strategies available to manage emotions. For instance, Riley  
 5732 explained:

5733           Just learning new things from each other to help us and the general notion  
 5734           that people actually want to be there you know because you’ve got a group  
 5735           that actually want to do things together, it’s not as if we’ve all been forced to  
 5736           come in. We want to be here with each other.

5737 See Table 6.3 for full details of this CMO configuration.

5738 **Table 6.3**

5739 *CMO Configuration 1.2: Emotional Regulation and Coping Strategies*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Many young people experienced challenges regulating their thoughts and emotions.	During the workshops, young people shared their emotional regulation and coping strategies and had the opportunity to learn from their peers.	Young people felt heard, supported, and recognised by their peers.	Development of close relations within the group and an increase in the strategies available to manage emotions.

5740           **6.3.1.3 CMO Configuration: 1.3: Controlling Your Inner Dialogue.** The  
 5741 findings from the observations, interviews, and group reflections revealed that young  
 5742 people had encountered chaotic home environments (e.g., family disruption,  
 5743 instability, and substance abuse), which had negatively impacted their thought  
 5744 patterns, self-perceptions, and feelings of self-worth (context). For instance,  
 5745 Gabrielle described the impact of her upbringing on her ability to interpret situations:

5746           I’ve been brought up to look at things negatively because when I was little  
 5747           my parents would always be negative and it had like a big effect on me now  
 5748           in terms of how I feel about myself. Because there’s loads of sayings about  
 5749           the way you were brought up when you’re little affects you when you’re  
 5750           older. So, I was always taught to look at things negative and because it’s been  
 5751           happening since I was little, it’s quite hard to channel out.



5752 Within this context, the EMPOWER programme provided opportunities for the  
5753 young people to develop a recognition and awareness of their own ways of thinking  
5754 and to practice controlling, countering, and changing negative thoughts (e.g., role  
5755 play scenarios and thought journals) (mechanism). This led to young people making  
5756 a conscious effort to control their inner dialogue and negative thinking patterns  
5757 throughout the programme (mechanism). Adrian explained: “I’ve definitely tried to  
5758 change my thinking. [I’ve] just dove straight into things and gave everything a go  
5759 you know instead of thinking that I can’t do something.” Similarly, Louie noted how  
5760 keeping a thought journal had helped him to change his perspective and thinking:  
5761 “Writing my thoughts down made me stop worrying about what could go wrong all  
5762 the time and instead look at what could go right.” Gabrielle corroborated these  
5763 sentiments, she stated:

5764 [I] changed the way I look at things and changed the way I deal with things,  
5765 because well you know what I was like, I’d look at how hard something was  
5766 and I would look at how difficult something is and “no I’m not doing it, can’t  
5767 do it” but now I’d do it anyway. So, it’s a fact of stop saying, “I can’t do it”  
5768 and saying, “I can do it and I will do it.” Because fear is just in your head, it’s  
5769 something that we make up.

5770 Consequently, the evident outcomes included enhanced self-efficacy, agency,  
5771 and a willingness among young people to attempt activities and challenges that were  
5772 outside of their comfort zones during the EMPOWER programme. As Connor  
5773 attested: “The tree climbing seems the most challenging like, looks like you’ve gotta  
5774 have upper body strength, but I’ll give it a go.” The corresponding CMO  
5775 configuration is presented in Table 6.4.

5776 **Table 6.4**5777 *CMO Configuration 1.3: Controlling Your Inner Dialogue*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Many young people had encountered chaotic home environments (e.g., family disruption, instability, and substance abuse), which had impacted on their thought patterns, self-perceptions, and feelings of self-worth.	Through the classroom activities (e.g., role play scenarios and thought journals), young people developed a recognition and awareness of their thought patterns and practiced controlling, countering, and changing negative thoughts.	Young people made a conscious effort to control their inner dialogue and thinking patterns.	Increased self-efficacy, agency, and a willingness to attempt activities and challenges that were outside of their comfort zones.

5778 **6.3.1.4 Refined Programme Theory 1: Positive Psychology and**  
5779 **Strengths-Focused Workshops.** In the context of young people who experienced  
5780 low self-esteem, self-doubt, and feelings of hopelessness, the workshops offered  
5781 opportunities for them to identify and discover their own strengths, assets, and  
5782 virtues, and to positively reflect on the skills developed during their education,  
5783 employment, and volunteering experiences. As a result, this led to a recognition of  
5784 their personal strengths and assets, enhanced feelings of competence and confidence  
5785 in their abilities and resulted in a strong sense of urgency to act on their strengths and  
5786 assets.

5787 In line with the initial programme theory, there was evidence to suggest that  
5788 in the context of young people who encountered challenges regulating their thoughts  
5789 and emotions, the workshops enabled young people to share their own coping  
5790 strategies and to learn from their peers. This led to young people feeling heard,  
5791 supported, and recognised by their peers. Outcomes observed as a result included the  
5792 development of close relations within the group and an increase in the strategies  
5793 available to manage emotions.

5794 Many young people in EMPOWER had experienced chaotic home  
5795 environments which, in turn, had negatively impacted their thought patterns, self-  
5796 perceptions, and feelings of self-worth. In such contexts, the programme provided  
5797 young people with opportunities to develop a recognition and awareness of their  
5798 thoughts and to practice controlling, countering, and changing these when needed.  
5799 This led to young people making a conscious effort to control their inner dialogue  
5800 and negative thinking patterns. Consequently, the young people demonstrated

5801 enhanced self-efficacy, agency, and a willingness to attempt activities and challenges  
5802 that were outside of their comfort zone during the EMPOWER programme.

5803 **6.3.2 Initial Programme Theory 2: Sport, Physical Activity, and Outdoor**  
5804 ***Adventure Experiences***

Sport, physical activity, and outdoor adventure experiences may be powerful platforms to enhance disengaged young peoples' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes (Lubans et al., 2012; Super et al., 2018a). In particular, these activities may provide young people with an opportunity to interact and communicate with peers, form friendship groups, build trust, enhance feelings of competence, self-esteem, and resilience through overcoming challenges and accomplishing goals, and may promote overall physical activity participation (Armour & Sandford, 2013; Bailey et al., 2013; Green et al., 2000). Additionally, in the context of disengaged young people, EMPOWER may offer access to new experiences (e.g., climbing, and woodland activities) that, in turn, could provide an experiential educational environment where young people can learn through actively participating in meaningful and purposeful outdoor challenges (Garst et al., 2001).

5805 This initial programme theory explores the role of sport, physical activity,  
5806 and outdoor adventure experiences as processes and mechanisms that may lead to  
5807 desirable outcomes among disengaged young people. Consistent with the initial  
5808 programme theory, there was evidence to suggest that participation in the activities  
5809 led to the establishment of trusting and supportive relationships among young  
5810 people, enhanced self-esteem, and increased physical activity levels. However, the  
5811 activities also illustrated different ways of working. The findings pertaining to  
5812 context, mechanism, and outcome patterns are detailed below.

5813 **6.3.2.1 CMO Configuration 2.1: Re-Establishing Trust.** A number of the  
5814 young people participating in EMPOWER had experienced exposure to early life  
5815 adversity which, in turn, had led to them experiencing reticence towards trusting  
5816 others (context). For example, one of the young people<sup>11</sup> recalled:

5817 I lost three people to suicide... [One of my parents] was heavily on drugs, I  
5818 got taken away from them when I was six. So, I hadn't seen them since I was  
5819 six. One night, we had a knock at like nine and it was the police... I went  
5820 upstairs but I sat on top of the landing because I didn't know what was going  
5821 on and because kids are nosy, when they see the police, they're going to want

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<sup>11</sup> Due to the sensitive information, no pseudonym has been used to protect the identity of the young person.

5822 to know aren't they? They said [my parent] had been found in their flat of a  
 5823 drug overdose. Well, it broke me but then [my parent] was like why are you  
 5824 crying? You haven't seen them for so long, I don't like [them] so why are  
 5825 you upset about it? Then I'm like it doesn't matter about all of that, I know  
 5826 they were on drugs and everything but at the end of the day that's [my  
 5827 parent], my actual blood like... So, because of things that have happened, I  
 5828 don't have a lot of trust anymore, like I don't find it easy to trust.

5829 The EMPOWER programme provided opportunities for the young people to  
 5830 engage in mentally and physically demanding activities that were outside their  
 5831 comfort zone (e.g., rock and tree climbing) (mechanism). For many, these activities  
 5832 activated feelings of fear and vulnerability, leading to them having to trust and rely  
 5833 upon one another in order to successfully complete the tasks (mechanism). As  
 5834 discussed by Connor: "It all comes down to trust, putting yourself in new situations  
 5835 and trusting the group to help you." Gabrielle concurred:

5836 Well for me it's the trust, I had to trust Harry, Remy, and a man [climbing  
 5837 instructor] I didn't even know and had never seen before, I had to trust them  
 5838 to hold the rope. So, I thought, I kept thinking that I'd just go flying down if I  
 5839 fell.

5840 Similarly, Riley described the role of the climbing activities in helping to build trust  
 5841 among young people:

5842 The rock and tree climbing helps with trust because... Well, if you think  
 5843 about it logically, you're basically hanging from a harness above the floor.  
 5844 You know, you've either got to trust someone to hold the rope or you just  
 5845 don't do it. So, it's kind of chucking someone in the deep end and saying  
 5846 they're going to hold you and you have to trust them. And because some  
 5847 people have had bad experiences in the past, they don't trust people. And so,  
 5848 putting them there in that situation and doing that exercise proves that people  
 5849 can be trusted and will help people who you know have trust issues... It puts  
 5850 you out of your comfort zone.

5851 Of note, however, the experience of tree climbing activated mechanisms of  
 5852 panic and anxiety among a minority of the young people. In such instances, the  
 5853 young people did then explain that completing the activity had led to a greater sense  
 5854 of control over their anxiety (outcome). For instance, during a group reflection,  
 5855 Jordan commented: "It was really hard to be honest with you, I kept wussing out, [I]

5856 didn't think I'd do it, but [I] didn't let my thoughts knock me down, [I] broke down  
 5857 but got back up." Collectively, in the context of disengaged young people,  
 5858 involvement in the climbing activities had positive outcomes, including the  
 5859 formation of caring, trusting, and supportive relationships within the group. This was  
 5860 illustrated by Remy: "I didn't know anyone at the start of this [EMPOWER], but  
 5861 'cause of all the activities and games we've done, I got to know everyone just  
 5862 through working together and trusting each other." See Table 6.5 for further details.

5863 **Table 6.5**

5864 *CMO Configuration 2.1: Re-Establishing Trust*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Due to exposure to early life adversity during their childhood, many of the young people found trusting people difficult.	Young people were provided with opportunities to engage in mentally and physically demanding activities that were outside their comfort zones	These activities triggered feelings of fear and vulnerability, leading to young people having to trust and rely upon one another in order to successfully complete the tasks. For others, the activities activated mechanisms of panic and anxiety.	The formation of caring, trusting, and supportive relationships within the group, and a greater sense of control over their anxiety.

5865 **6.3.2.2 CMO Configuration 2.2: Engagement and Focus.** According to the  
 5866 data, it was apparent that many of the young people in the programme experienced  
 5867 high levels of family conflict and difficult home environments (context). As Charlie  
 5868 and Gabrielle's comments reveal: "I've grew up with people getting aggressive from  
 5869 alcohol... Just arguing and fighting and that" (Charlie) and "I don't open up to  
 5870 anyone in my family. I'm scared to speak to [my parent] because it usually is taken  
 5871 the wrong way and causes full on riots [arguments]" (Gabrielle).

5872 Against these challenging backgrounds, The EMPOWER programme placed  
 5873 these young people in an environment where they needed to direct their attention and  
 5874 concentration solely on the activity at hand (e.g., wood carving and rock/tree  
 5875 climbing) (mechanism). In several cases, these activities triggered mechanisms of  
 5876 engagement and focus and led to young people being present in the moment. For  
 5877 instance, Gabrielle succinctly stated: "I didn't just enjoy it [wood carving]. I loved it.  
 5878 I was gutted when it was over. It made me calm and focused, and I were thinking  
 5879 about nothing else and same with tree climbing, I wasn't thinking about anything

5880 else.” Connor’s experiences were similar, he explained how “when you’re climbing,  
5881 you’re only focused on which rock you’re gonna grab next. Nothing else matters.”  
5882 Additionally, when asked to explain the impact of the wood carving activities,  
5883 Adrian described: “I found it therapeutic. It was just like calming and nice to really  
5884 focus on something for a while.”

5885 Resulting outcomes included enhanced self-esteem, sense of achievement and  
5886 pride, and improved relationships with family members. As explained by Connor,  
5887 Harry, and Jordan: “I found new limits while climbing the wall and felt good  
5888 afterwards, sense of achievement and all” (Connor), “I took the stick [from the wood  
5889 carving activity] on the bus home... Well, I had to explain because [my parent] was  
5890 like ‘why are you bringing a stick home’ and I was like I carved it and they said it  
5891 looked good” (Harry), and “I like making something and then just looking at it for  
5892 ages afterwards, don’t know, makes me feel proud. My [parent] said they were proud  
5893 too like” (Jordan). This CMO configuration is presented in Table 6.6.

5894 **Table 6.6**

5895 *CMO Configuration 2:2: Engagement and Focus*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Many young people experienced high levels of family conflict and difficult home environments.	Young people were placed in an environment where they needed to direct their attention and concentration solely on the task at hand (e.g., wood carving and rock/tree climbing).	This triggered engagement and focus and led to young people being present in the moment.	Enhanced self-esteem, sense of achievement and pride, and improved relationships with family members.

5896 **6.3.2.3 CMO Configuration 2.3: Reduced Sedentary Activities and**  
5897 **Behaviours.** Many young people in EMPOWER spent a considerable amount of  
5898 time engaged in sedentary behaviours, including, watching television, computer  
5899 activities, and social media usage. The following excerpt from Adrian highlights this:  
5900 “I love playing on the PC and gaming, I spend a lot of time on video games,  
5901 watching movies, and being on my phone, like on Instagram.” In the context of  
5902 young people highly engaged in sedentary activities and behaviours, EMPOWER  
5903 provided exposure and access to a diverse range of physical activities, sports, and  
5904 outdoor adventure experiences which they may not otherwise have been able to  
5905 access (mechanism). In Louie’s case: “These [physically active] games I hadn’t

5906 heard of before, so, they were new to me. I enjoyed them and the different sports.”

5907 Similarly, Connor revealed:

5908           It was good to get more experiences and try different things, all the sports  
5909           we’ve played, a couple of the active game sessions, they were fun, and erm  
5910           rock climbing, [that was the] first time I’ve ever done it. I wouldn’t you know  
5911           get to do things like that otherwise like.

5912           Through their involvement in the activities, young people described feeling  
5913           happier, calmer, and less isolated (mechanism). For example, the young people noted  
5914           that: “I found the sports and that [activities] calming, they sort of chilled me out”  
5915           (Connor), “I’m finding them [physical activities and sports] good, I feel happier in  
5916           myself and I can have a good chat and laugh with everyone” (Gabrielle), and “Well,  
5917           instead of being in the house alone, you’re actually out doing orienteering, games,  
5918           climbing, and sports with new people and making friends” (Riley).

5919           As a consequence, this led to reduced sedentary activities among the young  
5920           people and enhanced their motivation to continue to participate in physical activity  
5921           (outcome). As Connor attested: “I’m more active now; testing my willpower by  
5922           walking long distances, even when I’m tired and can’t be arsed, I keep going sort of  
5923           thing.” Adrian and Riley shared similar situations: “I’ve been getting outside and  
5924           spending less time on video games. [I’m] enjoying the outdoors more because of this  
5925           [EMPOWER]” (Adrian), and “I’ve been exercising, walking pretty much everywhere  
5926           and now ‘cause of this course, I’m thinking of joining the gym” (Riley).

5927           Additionally, Gabrielle described how her involvement in the EMPOWER  
5928           programme had motivated her to “have a try of a dance and fitness class. I wouldn’t  
5929           have considered that before this course.” This CMO configuration is displayed in  
5930           Table 6.7.

5931 **Table 6.7**5932 *CMO Configuration 2.3: Reduced Sedentary Activities and Behaviours*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Many of the young people spent a considerable amount of time engaged in sedentary activities.	The programme provided exposure and access to a diversity of physical activities, sports, and outdoor adventure experiences which the young people otherwise may not have been able to access.	Involvement in the activities led to young people feeling happier and calmer, and reduced feelings of isolation.	Reduced sedentary activities and enhanced motivation to continue to participate in sport and physical activity.

5933 **6.3.2.4 Refined Programme Theory 2: Sport, Physical Activity, and**  
5934 **Outdoor Adventure Experiences.** In the context of young people who experienced  
5935 challenges trusting others, EMPOWER provided opportunities for them to engage in  
5936 mentally and physically demanding activities that were outside their comfort zone.  
5937 These activities triggered feelings of fear and vulnerability, leading to young people  
5938 having to trust and rely upon one another in order to successfully complete the tasks.  
5939 For others, however, the experience of tree climbing activated mechanisms of panic  
5940 and anxiety. In this instance, the young people indicated that completing the activity  
5941 led to a greater sense of control over their anxiety. Collectively, the young people  
5942 displayed outcomes including the formation of caring, trusting, and supportive  
5943 relationships within the group.

5944 In contexts where young people experienced high levels of family conflict  
5945 and difficult home environments, EMPOWER placed young people in an  
5946 environment where they needed to direct their attention and concentration solely on  
5947 the activity at hand (e.g., wood carving and climbing activities). These activities  
5948 triggered mechanisms of engagement and focus and led to young people being  
5949 present in the moment. This set of findings is consistent with research on acceptance  
5950 and commitment therapy (Harris, 2019), that highlights the importance of developing  
5951 engaging, savouring, and focusing skills in order to connect deeply with the activity.  
5952 Outcomes observed as a result of being present and completing tasks included  
5953 enhanced self-esteem, sense of achievement and pride, and improved relationships  
5954 with family members.



5955 Consistent with the initial programme theory, there was evidence to suggest  
 5956 that EMPOWER promoted physical activity participation. Specifically, many of the  
 5957 young people spent a considerable amount of time engaged in sedentary behaviours.  
 5958 Within this context, EMPOWER provided exposure and access to a range of physical  
 5959 activities, sports, and outdoor adventure experiences. Through participating in these  
 5960 activities, young people described feeling happier, calmer, and less isolated. As a  
 5961 result, this led to reduced sedentary behaviours among the young people and  
 5962 enhanced their motivation to continue to participate in physical activity.

### 5963 **6.3.3 Initial Programme Theory 3: Work-Based Placements/Preparation**

Work-based placements may provide disengaged young people with valuable insight into the working environment (Kis, 2016). Through engagement with a variety of placements, young people may acquire important employability skills and attributes, including, confidence, communication, initiative, responsibility, and time-management strategies (Chen, 2011; Kis, 2016). Additionally, by allowing young people to practice working they may develop a vision for their future and clarity regarding the types of occupations they would like to pursue (Chen, 2011). Further, in the context of disengaged young people, exposure to higher education through a university campus visit may help young people to familiarise themselves with university, gain an awareness of the various courses and opportunities available, raise their aspirations, and enhance the likelihood that they consider university as a potential option (Beck, 2015; Fleming & Grace, 2015; Whitley et al., 2017). Finally, providing opportunities for young people to complete practice interviews with a variety of employers may help them to feel more comfortable within job interviews and enhance young peoples' capacity to articulate their strengths, assets, and virtues to employers (Taylor & Hooley, 2014).

5964 This initial programme theory describes the potential impact of work-based  
 5965 placements and preparation activities. There was evidence to support many elements  
 5966 of this theory, particularly the emphasis on employability skills and attributes, the  
 5967 development of a vision for the future, enhanced clarity regarding occupations and  
 5968 higher education opportunities, and improved interviewing skills. These findings are  
 5969 discussed in more detail below.

5970 **6.3.3.1 CMO Configuration 3.1: Sense of Purpose and Direction.** Many  
 5971 young people had limited work experience and lacked a clear sense of direction  
 5972 (context). For instance, when asked to describe their employment experiences at the  
 5973 start of the programme, Harry noted that: "I did go to work at one point but that  
 5974 didn't go down well for me. I haven't [got] that much experience of working mind...

5975 I don't know what it is I want to do." Consistent with this perspective, Connor  
5976 described:

5977 I've done gardens [gardening] before, but it's just, well, what's the point? £5  
5978 for two hours. So, it would be good to get work experience. See how  
5979 workplaces sort of cope and how they work, you know, the other side of  
5980 everything. That way I can compare different experiences and expand my  
5981 horizons, break the shell a bit.

5982 Within the context of young people who had limited experience of the  
5983 working environment, EMPOWER provided the young people with opportunities to  
5984 explore and experiment with a range of occupations they were interested in and  
5985 passionate about (e.g., refereeing at rugby camps and festivals, sports coaching,  
5986 looking after younger children, and construction work) (mechanism). This led to  
5987 young people developing new skills and competencies, including, communication,  
5988 leadership, and problem-solving skills. Additionally, the young people described  
5989 feeling energised and optimistic about their future (mechanism). Harry explained:

5990 [I] planned a drill for the camps, but it was short notice, so [I] had to think  
5991 fast and get it all set up and then explain it to the kids. It's good to see them  
5992 [children] enjoying it, do you know what I mean? Then I changed the drill up  
5993 and did something different. I'd like to keep helping at the camps and reffing  
5994 [refereeing] at the festivals, they're fun.

5995 Another young person, Riley, described the skills he had learned from working with  
5996 younger children:

5997 I learnt how to control a crowd, how to set up stuff, how to make sure you're  
5998 doing it the right way, how to enthuse children to be able to do one task and  
5999 then move to another. I also learnt that when kids fall over, you've got to go  
6000 over calm and collected and be like "what's happened?" "Are you okay?".  
6001 Because if you go over all panicked then they'll pick up on it and they'll  
6002 become stressed. But if you act calm and on their level then they'll see you  
6003 more as a person and they will think, well I can talk to him because he  
6004 understands what's going on. I really enjoyed all of the [rugby] camps, they  
6005 were good fun, I'd definitely do more of that sort of work in the future.

6006 Similarly, Gabrielle wrote in her journal:

6007 I loved working with the children, I loved the atmosphere, and they were so  
6008 lovely and a pleasure to work with, leaving them happy was amazing and

6009 heart-warming. I learnt to be more approachable and how to make others  
6010 smile even when they don't want to. I would love to help with the rugby  
6011 camps more often.

6012 Outcomes that arose from these activities included a sense of purpose and  
6013 direction, and enhanced confidence and motivation to re-engage with employment  
6014 opportunities. Gabrielle stated, for example:

6015 If it weren't for you and this programme, I wouldn't have the confidence that  
6016 I have right now. I'm willing now to go up to workers and ask if they have  
6017 any jobs available, I wouldn't normally just go up and ask someone about a  
6018 job. But I'm more motivated and so, I've been focusing on my CV and  
6019 making it so that it's spot on and really correct. I'm going to put my CV into  
6020 the [theatre] because the building is lovely, it's got loads to it and the shows  
6021 they put on and everything are amazing. I'd love to get a job there, whether  
6022 it's cleaning or working in the box office or anything else, it can always lead  
6023 to something more... The thought of working there excites me.

6024 Harry shared a similar situation, describing enhanced motivation to progress with his  
6025 refereeing:

6026 Through this [programme], I've been asked to referee games do you know  
6027 what I mean? So, it's upped my confidence to give refereeing a go and I'm  
6028 into Nigel Owens [Welsh rugby union referee] as well so there's that, he's a  
6029 good referee to go on really. When I get home, my refereeing book should be  
6030 in the house. I bought one, with red and yellow cards because I thought do  
6031 you know what I mean, if I'm been asked to referee at this festival, and I'm  
6032 gonna start refereeing games now, do you know what I mean, may as well  
6033 have one [refereeing book] hadn't I?

6034 Table 6.8 summarises this CMO configuration.

6035 **Table 6.8**6036 *CMO Configuration 3.1: Sense of Purpose and Direction*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Many of the young people had limited work experience and lacked a clear sense of direction.	The programme provided the young people with opportunities to explore and experiment with different occupations they were interested in and passionate about.	This led to young people developing new skills, including, communication, leadership, and problem-solving skills, and feeling energised and optimistic about their future.	Sense of purpose and direction and enhanced confidence and motivation to re-engage with employment opportunities.

6037 **6.3.3.2 CMO Configuration 3.2: Exposure to Higher Education.** Within  
6038 EMPOWER, the majority of young people had never attended a higher educational  
6039 institution (context). For example, during a group reflection, the young people noted  
6040 that: “I’ve never been to a university before, don’t think I know anyone who has”  
6041 (Harry) and “I wouldn’t know what to expect from a university” (Louie). Through  
6042 attending EMPOWER, the young people were provided with an opportunity to visit a  
6043 university campus. During this visit, they attended a range of theoretical and  
6044 practical workshops, subject tours, and listened to a number of student life talks. As a  
6045 result of these experiences, young people had a better understanding and perspective  
6046 regarding university (mechanism). As Louie attested: “University is different to what  
6047 I imagined. You’ve got to be a lot more independent than school and college.” Josh’s  
6048 experiences were similar, he explained:

6049           It gave me a new perspective on uni [university]. It’s different to how I  
6050           thought it was going to be, not as bad, I mean, yeah, it’s hard work, but  
6051           they’re [lecturers] not up in your face, nagging you to get the work done, it’s  
6052           a case of you having to be responsible and mature about it and get it done  
6053           yourself. If you don’t do it, then it’s pretty much your own fault.

6054 According to the data, it appeared that for some of the young people, they felt more  
6055 comfortable within the university environment than anticipated and were able to  
6056 imagine themselves as a university student (mechanism). As highlighted in the  
6057 following extracts from Gabrielle and Louie: “I could see myself here. The campus is  
6058 really nice and very big, and I’d like to make new friends from different places. They  
6059 have a performing arts society too; I would love to join that” (Gabrielle) and “I’m not

6060 sure what subject yet but I would like to study at a university like this in the future.  
6061 So, it has given me an idea of possibly going and applying for uni” (Louie).

6062 Others, however, were unable to connect with the university or envision their  
6063 future as a university student (mechanism). In Harry’s case, he explained: “It was  
6064 decent to see, and I liked the games and that, but I’m not into university really, I’m  
6065 more into hands-on, outdoor stuff, like construction work.” Consequently, for some  
6066 young people, the university visit led to an increased interest and desire to attend  
6067 university, while for others, the visit led to a desire to explore alternative options and  
6068 opportunities. For example, Josh described how the visit had encouraged him to  
6069 consider a diploma and apprenticeship scheme:

6070 It’s made me think more about what I wanna do. Because my plan now is to  
6071 go with a diploma in September, do four years, start level one, go up to level  
6072 four. ‘Cause it’s a level four diploma and once I’ve done that, either go into  
6073 sport or an apprenticeship route, unless I can go into work on the  
6074 apprenticeship side of it, but, in the end, I am still trying to figure everything  
6075 out.

6076 This is depicted further in Table 6.9.

6077 **Table 6.9**

6078 *CMO Configuration 3.2: Exposure to Higher Education*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
The majority of young people had never attended a higher educational institution.	The resource was the opportunity to visit a university campus. During this visit, young people attended a range of theoretical and practical workshops, subject tours, and listened to a number of student life talks.	For some young people, they felt comfortable within the university environment and were able to imagine themselves as a university student. For others, they were unable to connect with university or envision their future as a university student.	For some, the university visit led to an increased interest and desire to attend university, for others, the visit led to a desire to explore alternative options.

6079 **6.3.3.3 CMO Configuration 3.3: Interviewing Skills.** Many young people  
6080 perceived a 1-1 interview setting as challenging and stressful (context). This was  
6081 summarised by Harry and Jordan: “I struggle in interviews, but even people whose  
6082 done 50 and 60 interviews, everybody still struggles with them” (Harry) and  
6083 “Interviews are stressful ‘cause you might get a question [that] you haven’t practiced

6084 and your mind might go blank” (Jordan). Within this context, the programme  
6085 provided young people with the opportunity to participate in a mock interview event,  
6086 whereby they were interviewed by various employers (e.g., sport organisations,  
6087 videographers, dance choreographers, apprenticeship/traineeship co-ordinators,  
6088 university, and college educators). This offered young people a chance to practice  
6089 their interviewing skills, gain experience, and to receive extensive feedback from  
6090 credible sources (mechanism).

6091 As a consequence, young people listened attentively to employers’ feedback  
6092 and gained an awareness of how they could improve their interviewing skills  
6093 (mechanism). For instance, during a group discussion, the young people reflected on  
6094 their feedback: “When they [employers] gave me feedback, I found that really good.  
6095 I’ve got to be more enthusiastic they said. It’s because when I’m speaking, you can’t  
6096 really see much emotion. I’ll try and look more enthusiastic next time” (Connor),  
6097 “My feedback was to give more examples with my answers, make more eye contact,  
6098 and to dress smarter” (Jordan), “I got told that I was a bit intense and not to say too  
6099 much about myself at the beginning, spread it out more and wait to be asked kind of  
6100 thing” (Josh), “They said I was attentive and very friendly, and my answers were  
6101 detailed. The main thing to improve was not to keep my hands in my pockets but  
6102 that’s because I didn’t know what else to do with them” (Gabrielle) and “I did get  
6103 feedback on my nerves and confidence, I’ve never been confident, but I got through  
6104 it [interviews] and this course is helping me” (Louie). Of note, in the following  
6105 example from my field notes, I reflected on young peoples’ nervousness and anxiety  
6106 during the interview event:

6107 Today I realised just how overwhelming 1-1 interview situations are for  
6108 disengaged young people. Many of them experienced intense fear, anxiety,  
6109 and panic before their interviews. In particular, one young person was  
6110 physically shaking so much that they were unable to hold a glass of water  
6111 without spilling it. This event has made employers see just how much young  
6112 people care and how determined they are to find an opportunity that will  
6113 change their lives. I feel proud that employers from various organisations and  
6114 affiliations have had the chance to understand and get to know each young  
6115 person. But most importantly, I am grateful that they have had the  
6116 opportunity to see young peoples’ strengths, attributes, and potentialities in  
6117 the same way that I have been able to do throughout EMPOWER, and

6118 consequently, any preconceptions that employers may have held of  
6119 disengaged young people have now been challenged.

6120 The mock interview event led to positive outcomes among young people,  
6121 including, enhanced self-awareness and higher levels of confidence in their ability to  
6122 succeed in a 1-1 interview setting. This was summarised by Jordan: “This [interview]  
6123 practice has helped me [to] be better and given me confidence to face an interview in  
6124 the future.” The corresponding CMO configuration is presented in Table 6.10.

6125 **Table 6.10**

6126 *CMO Configuration 3.3: Interviewing Skills*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Many young people perceived a 1-1 interview setting as challenging and stressful.	The programme provided young people with the opportunity to participate in a mock interview event, whereby they were interviewed by different employers. This offered young people a chance to practice their interviewing skills, gain experience, and receive extensive feedback from credible sources.	Young people listened attentively to employers’ feedback and gained an awareness of how they could improve their interviewing skills.	Enhanced self-awareness and higher levels of confidence in their ability to succeed in a 1-1 interview setting.

6127 **6.3.3.4 Refined Programme Theory 3: Work-Based Placements/**

6128 **Preparation.** In accordance with the initial programme theory, the work-based  
6129 placements provided young people with valuable insight into the working  
6130 environment. Specifically, in the context of young people who lacked a clear sense of  
6131 direction and had limited working experience, EMPOWER provided opportunities  
6132 for young people to explore and experiment with a range of occupations they were  
6133 interested in and passionate about. In turn, this led to young people acquiring new  
6134 skills and competencies, such as, communication, leadership, and problem-solving  
6135 skills, and feeling energised and optimistic about their future. Resulting outcomes  
6136 included a sense of purpose and direction, and enhanced confidence and motivation  
6137 to re-engage with employment opportunities.

6138 In the context of young people who had never attended a higher educational  
6139 institution, the programme provided an opportunity for young people to spend a full  
6140 day at a university campus. Through this opportunity young people received access

6141 to new perspective, information, and advice. For some young people, they felt  
 6142 comfortable within the university environment and were able to imagine themselves  
 6143 as a university student. For others, however, they were unable to connect with the  
 6144 university nor envision their future as a university student. As such, for some, the  
 6145 university visit led to an increased interest and desire to attend university, for others,  
 6146 the visit led to a desire to explore alternative options and opportunities.

6147 Within EMPOWER, many young people perceived a 1-1 interview setting as  
 6148 challenging and stressful. The young people participated in a mock interview event,  
 6149 in which they were interviewed by various employers. This provided young people  
 6150 with an opportunity to practice their interviewing skills, gain experience, and to  
 6151 receive extensive feedback from credible sources. As a result, young people listened  
 6152 attentively to employers' feedback and gained an awareness of how they could  
 6153 improve their interviewing skills. Outcomes observed included enhanced self-  
 6154 awareness and higher levels of confidence in their ability to succeed in a 1-1  
 6155 interview setting.

6156 ***6.3.4 Initial Programme Theory 4: The Importance of a Youth-Driven Multi-***  
 6157 ***Component Programme***

By allowing young people to experience control and autonomy over the design and development of EMPOWER, they may be more likely to choose activities that are relevant to their own needs and experience feelings of empowerment, agency, and purpose (Powers & Tiffany, 2006; Sullivan et al., 2018). Further, through exposure to a diversity of modalities, including, positive psychology and strengths-focused workshops, sport, and outdoor adventure experiences, and work-based placements, and access to various forms of social support, such as, emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental types of support, young peoples' engagement and access to support systems may be enhanced.

6158 This initial programme theory explores the impact of a youth-driven multi-  
 6159 component programme. In line with the initial programme theory, the findings  
 6160 illustrated the importance of actively involving young people in the design and  
 6161 development of EMPOWER in order to establish an environment where young  
 6162 people felt heard, visible, and valued. Additionally, the young people described the  
 6163 benefits of providing access to emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental  
 6164 forms of support. Such findings will be explored in more detail below.

6165 **6.3.4.1 CMO Configuration 4.1: Feelings of Agency and Control.** At the  
 6166 start of EMPOWER, it was apparent that many of the young people experienced a



6167 lack of control over their lives (context). Riley stated, for example: “I don’t like  
6168 relying on someone else, I’d rather be independent. I’m sick of living off people  
6169 now.” Likewise, Josh shared:

6170           It’s a vicious cycle really because when it comes to jobs and work and stuff,  
6171           unless you’ve got experience well, you’re not gonna get it [job]. But you need  
6172           the job to get experience, you can’t work if you haven’t got it [experience].  
6173           It’s out of your control, it’s a vicious cycle.

6174           In such contexts, young people were provided with autonomy to co-design  
6175           their own multi-component programme and activities. This allowed young people the  
6176           opportunity to choose activities that were relevant to their own needs, interests, and  
6177           desires (mechanism). As explained by Adrian: “I liked that we had a say in what  
6178           things we did. Because we got to do things that we enjoyed like and we were  
6179           interested in.” Similarly, Josh articulated: “[I] really enjoyed it [EMPOWER] like. I  
6180           found it good going out to different places like seeing a university campus, and  
6181           picking which activities and that to do, ‘cause now I’ve got more experience in  
6182           things that I wanna do.” As a consequence, this led to young people feeling visible,  
6183           valued, and empowered (mechanism). In Riley’s case, he explained:

6184           It was just the fact we were actually given some responsibility, you know, it  
6185           wasn’t just, ‘Oh this is what we’re gonna be doing’, it was literally asking us  
6186           what things we wanted to do and listening... it made me feel useful.

6187 Gabrielle echoed these sentiments: “The course has been amazing, and it’s helped me  
6188 a lot. I’ve been able to make my own choices and decisions and do things that I’m  
6189 passionate about, and it’s given me the belief in myself that I didn’t have before.”

6190           Outcomes evident among young people included improved self-esteem and  
6191           enhanced feelings of agency and control over their lives. As highlighted in the  
6192           following extracts from Louie and Josh: “I have the confidence now to start going to  
6193           job fayres, handing out my CV, and applying for different courses” (Louie), and:  
6194           “When it comes to job interviews and that now, when people say, ‘you haven’t got  
6195           the skills and experience needed’, I can say but I have, I’ve done this [EMPOWER]  
6196           and I’ve volunteered at the [rugby] camps” (Josh). Another young person, Riley  
6197           explained:

6198           Being on this course and looking into possible careers has made me wanna  
6199           get the qualification of a mechanic, carpenter, brick layer, and plasterer.

6200           Because say if I get the qualifications of them, then I’ll be able to mend a car,

6201 say if a car breaks down... or say if there's a hole in mine or someone's roof  
6202 then I can fix it. I'll have all the materials and tools to just do it myself.

6203 This CMO configuration is presented in Table 6.11.

6204 **Table 6.11**

6205 *CMO Configuration 4.1: Feelings of Agency and Control*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Many young people experienced a lack of control over their lives.	Young people were provided with autonomy to co-design their own programme and activities. This allowed young people the opportunity to choose activities that were relevant to their own needs, interests, and desires.	This led to young people feeling visible, valued, and empowered.	Improved self-esteem and enhanced feelings of agency and control over their lives.

6206 **6.3.4.2 CMO Configuration 4.2: Access to Emotional, Informational,**  
6207 **Appraisal, and Instrumental Support.** Within the context of young people who  
6208 had limited access to social support, EMPOWER provided exposure to a diversity of  
6209 modalities (i.e., classroom, sport, outdoor adventure experiences, and work-based  
6210 placements), which enabled young people to receive access to emotional (e.g.,  
6211 reassurance and compassion), informational (e.g., advice and guidance), appraisal  
6212 (e.g., understanding of strengths and assets, and the opportunity to practice using  
6213 them), and instrumental (e.g., access to resources, transportation, and training  
6214 opportunities), forms of support from peers, facilitators, and instructors (mechanism).

6215 According to Connor, he explained how he received access to informational  
6216 and instrumental forms of support:

6217 I got knowledge about what construction jobs you can do; I was just  
6218 assuming it was mainly one thing but there's lots of different roles working in  
6219 construction. I found it good to go on the work site and to see the offices and  
6220 that as well.

6221 Additionally, Jordan reflected on the opportunity to identify his strengths during the  
6222 classroom lessons and to then practice using them throughout the various modalities  
6223 (appraisal support):

6224 The classroom stuff was good 'cause I learnt about my communication skills  
6225 and that, so, you need the classroom stuff but then doing the [rugby] camps

6226 and sports with everyone, makes you better at your communication skills  
 6227 because you have to make sure that you're not talking over people who  
 6228 actually want to talk and don't really get the chance to [talk].

6229 Gabrielle described the benefits of providing emotional support to her peers and  
 6230 receiving emotional support from her peers:

6231 It was good to listen to other peoples' opinions and erm, just being a shoulder  
 6232 to cry on if any of them needed it. Because even though bad stuff has  
 6233 happened [to me] and everything, I'm still there for others, and throughout  
 6234 this course, other people have been there for me as well. And that's nice  
 6235 because sometimes people don't think they can open up to each other, and  
 6236 maybe some people haven't got anyone to talk to. So, I'll be there for them  
 6237 and then at the same time then it makes me feel like I have a purpose. I'll  
 6238 never be able to just sit there and watch someone suffer in silence on their  
 6239 own because I've been through it myself and I wouldn't want anyone  
 6240 experiencing that type of thing so I'm just there for everyone.

6241 Such experiences triggered feelings of engagement, happiness, and support  
 6242 among young people (mechanism). As explained by Riley and Louie: "I mean we all  
 6243 pretty much got on from the first day and it's been great fun to spend time together  
 6244 and get to know each other" (Riley) and "I'm happy because I've achieved a lot of  
 6245 things that I didn't know I could do. And I've also made a lot of friends" (Louie). In  
 6246 turn, this led to expanded social networks and support systems (outcome). Table 6.12  
 6247 summarises this CMO configuration.

6248 **Table 6.12**

6249 *CMO Configuration 4.2: Access to Emotional, Informational, Appraisal, and*  
 6250 *Instrumental Support*

Context	Mechanism (resource)	Mechanism (reasoning)	Outcome
Young people had limited access to social support.	EMPOWER provided exposure to a diversity of modalities which enabled young people to receive access to emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental forms of support from facilitators, peers, and instructors.	This triggered feelings of engagement, happiness, and support among young people.	Expanded social networks and support systems.

6251                   **6.3.4.3 Refined Programme Theory 4: The Importance of a Youth-**  
6252 **Driven Multi-Component Programme.** Consistent with the initial programme  
6253 theory, in the context of disengaged young people who experienced a lack of control  
6254 over their lives, EMPOWER provided young people with autonomy to co-design  
6255 their own multi-component programme and activities. As such, this enabled young  
6256 people the opportunity to choose activities that were relevant to their own needs,  
6257 interests, and desires. This led to young people feeling visible, valued, and  
6258 empowered, which, in turn, resulted in improved self-esteem and enhanced feelings  
6259 of agency and control over their lives.

6260                   Within the context of young people who had limited access to social support,  
6261 EMPOWER provided exposure to a diversity of modalities which enabled young  
6262 people to receive access to emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental  
6263 forms of support from peers, facilitators, and instructors. This triggered feelings of  
6264 engagement, happiness, and support among young people. Consequently, outcomes  
6265 observed included expanded social networks and support systems.

6266 **6.4 Discussion: How did EMPOWER work, for whom and under which**  
6267 **circumstances?**

6268 The aim of this realist evaluation was to understand how, why, and under  
6269 which circumstances the EMPOWER programme impacted the engagement,  
6270 behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes of disengaged young people aged 17-23  
6271 years. The findings identified the contextual elements and underlying mechanisms  
6272 through which EMPOWER led to desirable and undesirable engagement,  
6273 behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes. Specifically, according to the data, the  
6274 initial programme theories were supported, expanded, and refined in order to explain  
6275 how different outcomes arose among the young people. This section will discuss the  
6276 findings of this study in relation to Chapters 4 and 5 (i.e., Study 1 and 2), relevant  
6277 literature, the implications for practice, and propose directions for future programmes  
6278 for disengaged young people who are outside of education, employment, and  
6279 training.

6280 The findings from this evaluation supported and reinforced the conclusions  
6281 made in previous chapters (i.e., Study 1 and 2) that indicated that for programmes to  
6282 facilitate positive outcomes among disengaged young people it was important that  
6283 facilitators endorsed a strengths-based orientation, and that young people were  
6284 provided with access to a diverse range of modalities and forms of support (e.g.,  
6285 emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental), had opportunities to engage in  
6286 work-based learning, and were provided with exposure and access to new activities  
6287 and experiences. Thus, taken together, it is apparent that in the context of disengaged  
6288 young people both *within* school settings and *outside* of education and employment,  
6289 opportunities to identify strengths, assets, and virtues, expand social networks, and  
6290 access new learning opportunities and experiences may serve as effective  
6291 mechanisms through which multi-component programmes can enhance engagement,  
6292 behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes. However, the findings from the current  
6293 study also highlighted novel insights regarding the contexts and mechanisms that  
6294 underlie the effectiveness of a multi-component programme for disengaged young  
6295 people who have encountered lengthy periods outside of education and employment.

6296 For instance, within EMPOWER, many of the young people had encountered  
6297 negative experiences of education and employment, including bullying, school  
6298 dropout, low wages, short-term employment contracts, and constant job searches,  
6299 which, in turn, had led to low self-esteem, self-doubt, and feelings of hopelessness.

6300 These findings support the conclusion of previous research (Wong, 2016; Webster et  
6301 al., 2004), which illustrate how precarious work and short-term employment  
6302 contracts can reinforce a ‘discouraged worker effect’ in that, young people may  
6303 internalise feelings of pessimism and anxiety towards their future. Within this  
6304 context, opportunities for young people to identify, discover, and refine their  
6305 strengths, assets, and virtues were particularly powerful mechanisms through which  
6306 EMPOWER led to enhanced engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes.  
6307 Such findings correspond to other studies, which have concluded that the  
6308 identification of strengths and assets can serve as protective factors for disengaged  
6309 young peoples’ psychosocial wellbeing and functioning (Park, 2004; Quinlan et al.,  
6310 2012; Scales, 1999). However, the findings also extend previous research (Quinlan et  
6311 al., 2012; Seligman et al., 2005), by highlighting the importance of programmes  
6312 providing opportunities not only for young people to identify their strengths and  
6313 assets but also to practice using and developing them in new ways across a variety of  
6314 settings (e.g., work-based placements, sport, and outdoor adventure experiences).

6315         The findings from the current evaluation also demonstrate the value  
6316 associated with offering young people a safe environment to both share their own  
6317 emotional regulation and coping strategies with others and receive feedback and  
6318 suggestions from their peers. Consistent with prior research (Brown & Braun, 2013),  
6319 this suggests that through sharing their own experiences, peers not only help others  
6320 by role modelling effective strategies, but also act as providers of emotional support  
6321 which can encourage the formation of meaningful connections and relationships.  
6322 Identifying mechanisms that help disengaged young people to develop meaningful  
6323 connections and relationships are particularly important because positive and  
6324 supportive peer associations may promote health-enhancing resources, resilience,  
6325 and psychosocial adjustment (Anderson et al., 2013; McGrath & Noble, 2010). As  
6326 such, this finding has important implications for practice, pointing to the importance  
6327 of ensuring that young people have opportunities to enhance their emotional  
6328 regulation strategies through creating collaborative learning opportunities in which  
6329 young people actively share and reflect on their own experiences and participate in  
6330 meaningful discussions with their peers.

6331         Building upon previous research (Kelley, Cunningham, & Branscome, 2015;  
6332 Morris, 2015; Utlely & Garza, 2011), in the context of disengaged young people who  
6333 had negative thought patterns, low self-perceptions, and feelings of self-worth, the

6334 current study additionally highlights the value of using role play scenarios and  
6335 thought journals to help young people to learn how to control their thinking patterns  
6336 and enhance feelings of optimism, self-efficacy, and agency. Specifically, the  
6337 findings from this study showed that by engaging in role play and journaling  
6338 activities, young people expressed their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences, and  
6339 monitored the ways in which they perceived and interpreted events. Such positive  
6340 outcomes are particularly valuable when one considers that, for instance, based on  
6341 Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory, these positive emotions and  
6342 optimistic appraisals may lead to numerous desirable outcomes such as engagement,  
6343 achievement, adaptive coping resources, and emotional adjustment (Carver, Scheier,  
6344 & Segerstrom, 2010; Gillham & Reivich, 2004; Seligman et al., 2005). As such, the  
6345 findings from the current study, combined with previous literature, provide  
6346 compelling support for the incorporation of role-play scenarios, and thought journals  
6347 as strategies to enhance disengaged young peoples' optimism, positive emotions, and  
6348 thinking patterns.

6349           Integrated outdoor adventure experiences such as, rock and tree climbing  
6350 alongside more reflective activities, may also be particularly useful when working  
6351 with disengaged young people. Particularly, aligned with previous studies (Armour  
6352 & Sandford, 2013; Lekies, Yost, & Rode, 2015; Witman, 1995) it was apparent  
6353 within the current study, that providing young people with an opportunity to  
6354 participate in outdoor adventure activities can challenge them in ways that helps  
6355 them to trust and rely upon one another. Developing such trust is something that is  
6356 particularly important for disengaged young people; many of whom have never  
6357 learnt to trust significant others within their school and home setting (Hanna, 2014;  
6358 Rhodes, 2002). Interestingly, in this study, as in prior research (Magee & Jeanes,  
6359 2011; Sanders et al., 2015; Spaaij, 2009), it was evident that the trusting relationships  
6360 formed among young people expanded their social networks and provided  
6361 opportunities for emotional support and connection.

6362           Beyond facilitating the development of trusting relationships, the findings  
6363 from this evaluation also illustrated how engagement in the outdoor adventure  
6364 activities enabled young people to experience enhanced self-esteem, feelings of  
6365 pride, and a sense of accomplishment. Importantly, the findings from the present  
6366 study advance previous work (Hermens et al., 2017; Lubans et al., 2012) by  
6367 unpacking the precise mechanisms through which these outcomes occurred.

6368 Specifically, by placing young people in an environment where they needed to direct  
6369 their attention solely on the task at hand (e.g., wood carving and climbing activities),  
6370 these activities activated mechanisms of engagement and focus, and led to them  
6371 being present in the moment. In turn, this allowed young people to regulate their  
6372 emotions and attention (i.e., they become highly focused/mindful and calm), and  
6373 successfully complete the tasks. These results suggest, in line with Harris's (2019)  
6374 acceptance and commitment therapy, that providing opportunities for disengaged  
6375 young people to be fully present in the moment can strengthen their engagement,  
6376 savouring, focusing, and emotional regulatory skills, and increase their chances of  
6377 achieving successful outcomes. Given such findings, it seems appropriate, therefore,  
6378 that future re-engagement programmes incorporate activities that are engaging,  
6379 captivating, and meaningful, such as wood carving and climbing activities, to help  
6380 young people move from disaffection towards engagement and subsequently enhance  
6381 their psychosocial outcomes.

6382         Alongside outdoor activities, in contexts where disengaged young people had  
6383 limited work experience and lacked a clear sense of direction, it is apparent that  
6384 providing young people with opportunities to explore and experiment with a range of  
6385 occupations they were interested in and passionate about was also important. This set  
6386 of findings is consistent with other research, which concluded that opportunities for  
6387 work experience can serve as an effective engagement tool that can provide young  
6388 people with a sense of purpose and direction (Bloom, 2010). This enhanced sense of  
6389 purpose and direction may, in turn, reduce behaviour-related issues such as,  
6390 substance abuse, violence, depression, and suicidal thoughts (Benson et al., 1998),  
6391 and as such seems a particularly noteworthy outcome to target. Moreover, through  
6392 engagement with a range of occupations, it was apparent that many young people in  
6393 EMPOWER developed new skills and competencies, including, communication,  
6394 leadership, and problem-solving skills. These findings can be interpreted within the  
6395 human capital approach (Hamilton et al., 2013), which highlights that effective re-  
6396 engagement programmes help young people to develop and improve their work-  
6397 readiness competencies in order to prepare them for employment and/or educational  
6398 opportunities after programme completion (Symonds & O'Sullivan, 2017).

6399         Interestingly, in addition to the benefits associated with being exposed to  
6400 workplaces, in the context of disengaged young people who had never attended a  
6401 higher educational institution, exposure to a university campus enabled a number of



6402 young people to feel more comfortable within the university environment and to  
6403 imagine themselves as a university student. This finding is consistent with previous  
6404 work which has suggested that university visits can allow disengaged young people  
6405 to gain knowledge, perspective, and experience regarding university life, and may, in  
6406 turn, enhance their intentions to attend university and pursue higher education  
6407 (Fleming & Grace, 2015; Formby, Woodhouse, & Basham, 2020; Whitley et al.,  
6408 2017). Such findings are particularly important given that many disengaged young  
6409 people are often from low socio-economic families and are underrepresented in  
6410 higher education (DfE, 2020). Consequently, university campus visits may serve as  
6411 powerful mechanisms in enabling disengaged young people to experience changes in  
6412 their own ‘imagined futures’ and ‘possible’ selves (Fleming & Grace, 2015;  
6413 Harrison, 2018; Markus & Nurius, 1986). However, it is important to note that for  
6414 some students these visits did not serve to facilitate future thoughts pertaining to  
6415 attending university. Rather, these visits acted to reinforce their desire/interest to  
6416 pursue employment instead. Although such an outcome will not address the limited  
6417 representation of individuals from lower socio-economic families in higher  
6418 education, the outcome of encouraging engagement in work is positive, nonetheless.

6419 Finally, beyond the individual activities that were undertaken in the  
6420 programme, the active involvement of young people in the design and delivery of  
6421 EMPOWER was an important overarching mechanism that enhanced the  
6422 effectiveness of the programme. Similar to the pedagogies implemented by Hopper  
6423 and McHugh (2020) and Bergmark and Kostenius (2009), the EMPOWER  
6424 programme provided disengaged young people with the opportunity to co-design  
6425 their own activities and experiences, which, in turn, allowed young people to explore  
6426 *their* interests, ideas, strengths, and assets, and to design activities that were relevant  
6427 to their developing needs and goals. These experiences enabled young people to feel  
6428 visible, valued, and empowered, and led to enhanced feelings of agency and control  
6429 over their lives. Such findings concur with previous research (Christens & Dolan,  
6430 2011; Mitra, 2008; Powers & Tiffany, 2006) and have direct implications for the  
6431 design of multi-component programmes, in the context of disengaged young people.  
6432 Specifically, programmes are likely to be far more effective at re-engaging young  
6433 people when they actively include them in the decision making and learning process,  
6434 provide opportunities for young people to co-ordinate their own activities, and

6435 encourage young people to identify and express their innate strengths, assets, and  
6436 interests.

#### 6437 ***6.4.1 Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions for Research***

6438           Within the context of disengaged young people, relatively little attention has  
6439 been paid to the ways in which youth-driven programmes impact developmental  
6440 outcomes. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first realist evaluation of a youth-  
6441 driven multi-component programme utilising appreciative inquiry as a theoretical  
6442 framework to re-engage young people. Consequently, this realist evaluation responds  
6443 to the need to understand the contexts and mechanisms through which programme  
6444 participation leads to engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes among  
6445 disengaged young people. Additionally, the findings from the evaluation contribute  
6446 to a growing list of effective strategies to enhance disengaged young peoples' trust,  
6447 self-esteem, self-efficacy, agency, sense of purpose, emotional regulation, and  
6448 coping responses (see Borden & Serido, 2009).

6449           A key strength of this study was the six-month period of immersion in the  
6450 field prior to the implementation of EMPOWER. During this period, I was able to  
6451 get to know each young person and develop safe and high-quality, trusting  
6452 relationships that in turn, cultivated young peoples' interest and engagement with the  
6453 programme. Further, in this study, as in previous research (Kirshner, O'Donoghue, &  
6454 McLaughlin, 2002; MacDonald et al., 2011), the use of a facilitator (i.e., me) similar  
6455 in age to the young people promoted the development of trusting relations and  
6456 allowed young people to feel more comfortable discussing sensitive topics. Future  
6457 research should continue to explore the use of similar age facilitators/researchers  
6458 when co-designing programmes with, and for, disengaged young people.

6459           Despite the strengths of this realist evaluation, there were a number of  
6460 limitations that should be noted. First, although group reflections occurred  
6461 throughout the duration of the programme, the one-to-one interviews were conducted  
6462 at only one-time point, at the end of the EMPOWER programme. As such, young  
6463 peoples' responses may have been influenced by 'post-group euphoria' in that, the  
6464 interviews were conducted soon after programme completion (cf. Bowers et al.,  
6465 2019; Gillard, Watts, & Witt, 2009). Prospective, longitudinal research is therefore  
6466 needed in order to develop an understanding of disengaged young peoples' long-term  
6467 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes, and education/employment  
6468 trajectories. Moreover, despite the extensive steps taken to get to know the young

6469 people prior to the programme and to encourage participation, the numbers of  
6470 participants were low throughout the weeks. Although this is not uncommon for such  
6471 programmes, it is important to note because even if the most optimal programmes are  
6472 developed, if we cannot encourage young people to engage with them in the first  
6473 place, they are of limited value. As such, future research which seeks to develop  
6474 more effective strategies to first engage young people within programmes or focuses  
6475 on understanding the barriers to engagement would be particularly useful.

#### 6476 **6.4.2 Conclusion**

6477 In summary, the current study advances important bodies of research by  
6478 unpacking how, why, and under what conditions a youth-driven multi-component  
6479 programme contributes to developmental outcomes among disengaged young people.  
6480 Specifically, the findings demonstrate the importance of actively involving  
6481 disengaged young people in the research process and providing opportunities for  
6482 their voices to be heard. However, future research over longer time periods is needed  
6483 to understand the long-term sustainability effects of programmes, such as  
6484 EMPOWER, on young peoples' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial  
6485 outcomes.

## Chapter 7: General Discussion

### 6486 **7.1 Chapter Overview**

6487           The overarching aim of the thesis was to use realist evaluation to understand  
6488 how, and under which circumstances multi-component programmes may impact the  
6489 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes of disengaged students and  
6490 young people who are not in education, employment, or training. To achieve this  
6491 aim, three realist evaluations of multi-component programmes were conducted.  
6492 Through these realist evaluations, a thorough understanding of the contexts within  
6493 which the multi-component programmes were implemented, the underlying  
6494 mechanisms the programmes activated, and the impact the programmes had on  
6495 disengaged young peoples' developmental outcomes were identified. This chapter  
6496 comprises a general discussion through which the findings from the three evaluations  
6497 are collated, compared, and evaluated in line with both pre-existing literature and the  
6498 programme theories. Based on this discussion, implications for practice and future  
6499 programme development for disengaged young people are presented. Following this,  
6500 the key strengths and limitations of the thesis are summarised, and future research  
6501 directions are suggested. The chapter concludes sharing new insights regarding  
6502 knowledge translation and dissemination strategies and is followed by a reflexive  
6503 account that summarises my personal experiences, learning, and development.

### 6504 **7.2 How did the multi-component programmes work, for whom, and under** 6505 **which circumstances?**

6506           Overall, the findings from all three realist evaluations reinforced the  
6507 importance of facilitators endorsing and practicing a strengths-based approach.  
6508 Specifically, the results demonstrated the benefits arising from providing disengaged  
6509 young people with opportunities to identify and discover their own strengths, assets,  
6510 and virtues, and to practice using and developing them in new ways across a wide  
6511 range of activities (e.g., organising events within the community, volunteering,  
6512 refereeing, and delivering sports). Specifically, the current thesis highlights both the  
6513 short- and long-term impact such a strengths-based approach can have on facilitating  
6514 feelings of competence, empowerment, and pride, and in turn, helping young people  
6515 begin to shift their identity and recognise who they would like to be in the future.  
6516 Such a finding is important because, despite a substantial body of literature  
6517 indicating that strengths-based resources and activities can serve as powerful  
6518 mechanisms in enabling disengaged young people to experience positive

6519 psychosocial outcomes (Quinlan et al., 2012; Seligman et al., 2009), much of the  
6520 existing literature continues to adopt deficit-based perspectives (i.e., a focus on  
6521 reducing problem behaviours) (See Caldwell & Smith, 2006; Sutherland et al., 2010).  
6522 Given the substantial and consistent benefits associated with adopting a strengths-  
6523 based approach, researchers and practitioners who continue to focus on “fixing” the  
6524 “deficits” of disengaged young people are not only limiting the extent to which they  
6525 can truly enact change in young peoples’ lives, but also doing a disservice to the  
6526 participants in their studies.

6527           However, despite the positive outcomes associated with a strengths-based  
6528 approach, adopting, and implementing this was not without its challenges in the  
6529 current studies. Specifically, one of the barriers to successfully and effectively  
6530 generating a strengths-based ethos in studies 1 and 2 was the wider school context in  
6531 which the TACKLE programmes were embedded. That is, despite the best efforts of  
6532 the programme facilitators, there were certain teachers within the different schools in  
6533 which TACKLE was delivered who focused almost exclusively upon the  
6534 “weaknesses” or “deficits” of the students taking part in the programme. This was  
6535 most apparent through the disparaging remarks such teachers made when positive  
6536 feedback was provided regarding the students’ engagement or development. These  
6537 findings correspond to other studies conducted in school settings (Hinde, 2004;  
6538 Quinlan et al., 2012), which have previously concluded that the effectiveness of  
6539 strengths-based programmes can be reinforced or undermined by school officials’  
6540 (e.g., the Head teacher, teachers, and support staff) pedagogies, underlying  
6541 assumptions, and the extent to which they endorse a strengths-based approach. Given  
6542 such a finding, it would appear that to maximise the positive outcomes of such  
6543 programmes for disengaged young people, expanding programmes beyond simply  
6544 delivery to students and seeking to stimulate and instigate broader cultural change is  
6545 required.

6546           Although cultural changes are often very challenging and take considerable  
6547 time, there was evidence in this thesis of some relatively simple ways to begin to  
6548 instigate such change. Specifically, within the context of a deficit-based school  
6549 environment, a noteworthy finding of this research was that providing school  
6550 officials with opportunities to observe disengaged students in leadership roles and  
6551 positions of authority, such as refereeing and delivering sports sessions, helped them  
6552 to see their students’ strengths and assets in a way that had not been revealed to them

6553 outside of the programme. Consequently, after becoming aware of the students'  
6554 strengths and competencies, some of the teachers were subsequently more willing to  
6555 place students in positions of authority (e.g., co-ordinating lunch-time clubs and  
6556 after-school activities) within the school setting, something they would have  
6557 previously avoided. These findings are particularly encouraging given that positive  
6558 teacher-student interactions and expectations have been associated with enhanced  
6559 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes among disengaged students  
6560 (Rubie-Davies, 2006; Weinstein, 2002). Although further research is warranted to  
6561 investigate the long-term consequences that programmes such as TACKLE may have  
6562 on teachers' perceptions of their students and the wider school context and ethos, this  
6563 initial finding is positive and provides a clear strategy through which to help  
6564 stimulate change in teachers' perceptions.

6565           The importance of providing disengaged young people with a voice, an  
6566 opportunity to provide input and engage in decision-making opportunities was  
6567 highlighted and reiterated in the findings included within this thesis. In particular, the  
6568 findings from Chapter 6 (i.e., Study 3) demonstrated the benefits of actively  
6569 including young people *outside* of education and employment, in the design and  
6570 development of the EMPOWER programme. Consistent with prior research  
6571 (Anselma, Chinapaw, & Altenburg, 2020; Bergmark & Kostenius, 2009; Powers &  
6572 Tiffany, 2006; Rubin & Jones, 2007), by recognising young people as experts of  
6573 their own lives and involving them as co-programme designers, they were able to  
6574 identify activities that were informed by, and relevant to, their particular strengths,  
6575 interests, hopes, and dreams. As a result of this opportunity, disengaged young  
6576 people experienced enhanced feelings of empowerment, agency, and control over  
6577 their lives. Collectively, these findings add to accumulating evidence that youth-  
6578 driven programmes promote positive developmental outcomes among disengaged  
6579 young people and can serve as particularly powerful mechanisms in enabling them to  
6580 have their voices and experiences heard (Powers & Tiffany, 2006).

6581           In contrast to the autonomy and agency that could be provided to the young  
6582 people aged 17-23 years in Study 3, it was apparent that, in the context of disengaged  
6583 year 8 students (i.e., adolescents aged 12-13 years; Study 2), there was a requirement  
6584 for facilitators to provide more structure and leadership. Specifically, the findings  
6585 from this evaluation underscored the need for facilitators to provide the right amount  
6586 of structure and control in order to prevent the emergence of bullying behaviours, the

6587 enactment of hegemonic masculine identities, and ‘top dog’ competitive cultures  
6588 occurring among students. This set of findings supports the conclusions of Skille and  
6589 Waddington (2006) and Mahoney, Stattin, and Lord (2004), which showed that a  
6590 lack of adult control and structure was conducive to the development of hegemonic  
6591 masculine cultures, anti-social behaviours, group conflict, and the exclusion of young  
6592 people from activities. Thus, while it may be intuitively and theoretically appealing  
6593 to seek to create an autonomy-supportive environment when delivering programmes  
6594 for disengaged young people (Haudenhuyse et al., 2014), applying this without due  
6595 consideration of specific contextual factors (e.g., age of participants) may lead to  
6596 negative or detrimental outcomes, which distract from the potential efficacy of the  
6597 programme.

6598         To overcome the potential issues described above, there appear to be a  
6599 number of implications for programme facilitators and programme developers  
6600 working with disengaged young people, both *within* and *outside* of school settings.  
6601 First, it is apparent that there is a need for facilitators to receive ongoing training and  
6602 support regarding the implementation of age-appropriate monitoring, structure, and  
6603 boundaries. Second, it appears that rather than a focus on autonomy, it may be more  
6604 beneficial for facilitators to establish physical and psychological safety in order to  
6605 provide a context of belongingness and reduce the likelihood of iatrogenic effects,  
6606 including, bullying and delinquent behaviour. Third, the emphasis on competition  
6607 should be reduced and opportunities should be provided for young people to form  
6608 supportive and meaningful peer relationships. Finally, activities should be tailored to  
6609 suit the varying developmental stages of the young people involved in the  
6610 programme (Anderson et al., 2007; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Mahoney et al., 2004).

6611         In addition to the adoption of a strengths-based approach and the integration  
6612 of participants as active contributors to the programme, in line with previous  
6613 literature (Bocarro & Witt, 2018; Haudenhuyse et al., 2014), the findings from this  
6614 thesis also highlights the importance of the relationships that are established between  
6615 young people and adult facilitators. Specifically, the findings across all three studies  
6616 identified that the quality of the facilitator-young person relationship that was  
6617 established was an important mechanism through which programmes could stimulate  
6618 positive developmental outcomes. From the perspective of the young people, the  
6619 relationships formed with their one-to-one mentor (i.e., adult facilitators) provided  
6620 them with access to new perspective, advice, and career-related guidance, as well as

6621 the opportunity to develop conflict resolution and emotional regulatory skills.  
6622 Additionally, through prolonged engagement and interaction with their mentor, many  
6623 young people explained that they were able to develop mutual trust and respect with  
6624 their mentor, something that was often missing in their other relationships. The fact  
6625 that young people formed high-quality relationships with their mentors is particularly  
6626 important, given that, longitudinal research has shown the power of mentoring  
6627 relationships in helping disengaged young people to overcome adverse circumstances  
6628 and accomplish successful long-term trajectories (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Hurd  
6629 & Zimmerman, 2010; Werner & Smith, 1992).

6630           Importantly, however, although most participants were able to develop these  
6631 high-quality relationships, they did not always happen instantly. Rather, the findings  
6632 of this body of work indicated that, for several students, there were delays and/or  
6633 barriers to the formation of a trusting mentoring relationship. Consistent with many  
6634 previous studies (Ahrens et al., 2011; Gauthier et al., 1996; Rhodes, 2002), it was  
6635 evident that the personal nature of the mentoring relationships triggered painful  
6636 memories and vulnerabilities in certain students due to insecure and unstable  
6637 attachments with their own family members. Given such a finding, ensuring that  
6638 programmes are long enough to enable facilitators to engage with young people for  
6639 an extended period and thus have sufficient time for trusting relationships to develop  
6640 is particularly pertinent. Moreover, ensuring that facilitators are both aware of the  
6641 potential barriers they may encounter when attempting to engage with disengaged  
6642 young people and have been provided with appropriate insights and strategies to  
6643 support the development of quality relationships is needed.

6644           Specifically, in line with the recommendations of other scholars (Morrow &  
6645 Styles, 1995; Rhodes et al., 2009; Spencer, 2007), this thesis showed that mentors  
6646 were most likely to promote positive engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial  
6647 outcomes among disengaged young people and develop quality relationships with  
6648 them when they: 1) Got to know and understand young people through increased  
6649 time together; 2) Carefully designed the content of activities according to young  
6650 peoples' strengths, interests, and preferences; 3) Established clear and appropriate  
6651 boundaries that were sensitive to young peoples' context (e.g., the mentor did not  
6652 probe young people to reveal personal information); and; 4) Effectively  
6653 communicated with young people regarding cancellation of meetings, activities, and  
6654 the end date of the mentoring relationship in order to avoid feelings of shock,



6655 disappointment, and rejection among disengaged young people. Providing facilitators  
6656 with training prior to programmes, through which they can practice implementing  
6657 these strategies and subsequently incorporating them within programmes may be  
6658 useful to enhance the efficacy of future work.

6659         In addition to the incorporation of strategies and practices to promote trusting  
6660 mentoring relationships, the studies incorporated within this thesis highlighted the  
6661 promise of using outdoor adventure activities as powerful mechanisms through  
6662 which young people formed trusting peer relationships. Specifically, in the context of  
6663 young people who experienced reticence towards trusting others, the outdoor  
6664 adventure activities including rock and tree climbing created scenarios in which  
6665 young people were *required* to trust and depend upon one another in order to  
6666 successfully complete the tasks. In line with several key tenets of cognitive  
6667 behavioural therapy (Sheldon, 2011), by placing young people in conditions where  
6668 they *had* to confront their own doubts and suspicions, they were able to observe their  
6669 peers demonstrate consistent and reliable trusting behaviours. This, in turn, led to  
6670 young people re-establishing trust and regaining their ability to depend upon others,  
6671 which subsequently extended into other contexts, such as employment, education,  
6672 and community settings. This transition of trust into different contexts corresponds  
6673 with previous research, which has concluded that experiential learning provides a  
6674 powerful educational environment because young people appear to be more likely to  
6675 remember what they have learnt during outdoor activities and transfer these lessons  
6676 to other areas within their lives (Kolb, 2015). As such, this evidence provides  
6677 compelling support for the integration of outdoor adventure activities as important  
6678 mechanisms to stimulate deep learning, psychological safety, and trust formation  
6679 between disengaged young people.

6680         Although there were clear benefits associated with engagement in outdoor  
6681 activities, in order to more extensively re-ignite young peoples' engagement and  
6682 interest, the findings of this thesis point to the value of providing young people with  
6683 exposure to a range of modalities, resources, and pathways. In particular, it was  
6684 apparent that the amalgamation of modalities (i.e., mentoring, classroom, work-based  
6685 placements, sport, and outdoor adventure activities) worked in synergy to enhance  
6686 young peoples' engagement, motivation, and interest. For instance, access to a  
6687 multipronged approach provided opportunities for young people to develop a  
6688 recognition of their own knowledge, strengths, and interests, while simultaneously

6689 acquiring new knowledge, competencies, and skills. Through these experiences,  
6690 young people were able to envisage possible life directions and a more desirable  
6691 future. In turn, from the perspective of many young people, this re-ignited their  
6692 engagement and motivation in order to pursue their strengths, competencies, and  
6693 interests. Thus, through involvement in the multi-component programmes,  
6694 disengaged young people were able to envision a range of ‘possible’ and ‘imagined’  
6695 future selves (Gibson, 2004; Markus & Nurius, 1986).

6696           Moreover, in line with a human capital approach (Hamilton et al., 2013;  
6697 Hutchinson et al., 2016; Symonds & O’Sullivan, 2017), the findings from this thesis  
6698 showed that work-based placements, volunteering experiences, and mock interview  
6699 events can support disengaged young people in navigating the transition to  
6700 employment by developing their work-readiness competencies and employability  
6701 skills (e.g., self-awareness, communication, leadership, and problem-solving skills).  
6702 Interestingly, this focus on enhancing young peoples’ skills and competencies runs  
6703 contrary to the strategies adopted in other re-engagement programmes that have  
6704 attempted to direct young people into occupations quickly, without providing them  
6705 with the necessary training opportunities and the subsequent, knowledge, attributes,  
6706 and skills required to succeed within the workforce (Mawn et al., 2017; Symonds &  
6707 O’Sullivan, 2017). There is evidence to suggest that steering disengaged young  
6708 people into employment before they are ready may actually perpetuate feelings of  
6709 disaffection and reinforce and sustain a ‘discouraged worker effect’ (Wong, 2016).  
6710 Given such negative outcomes detailed in previous research when young people are  
6711 not prepared for work, combined with the positive outcomes associated with the  
6712 work-preparation activities included in the current thesis, it is clear that incorporating  
6713 activities to enhance young peoples’ work-readiness competencies is likely to be  
6714 valuable in helping them to find and maintain employment after programme  
6715 completion (Symonds & O’Sullivan, 2017).

6716           Finally, the findings from the longitudinal follow-up indicated the centrality  
6717 of context in determining whether multi-component programmes have long-term  
6718 sustainability effects. Specifically, in the context of students who experienced less  
6719 chaotic contextual circumstances (e.g., low self-esteem and disengagement towards  
6720 school), there was evidence to suggest that the resources of the multi-component  
6721 programme were sufficient to sustain improvements in students’ engagement, self-  
6722 esteem, and motivation. Comparatively, within the context of students who

6723 encountered extremely chaotic contextual circumstances (e.g., parental substance  
6724 abuse, neglect, gang affiliations, and deviant peer contagions), it was apparent that  
6725 the resources of the programme were not adequate to sustain improvements in  
6726 students' developmental outcomes. Consequently, based on these findings, it is  
6727 questionable whether multi-component programmes, such as TACKLE and  
6728 EMPOWER, are sufficient to compensate for young people facing high levels of  
6729 environmental risk factors and extremely complex lives. In such contexts of  
6730 heightened complexity, the findings from this research suggest the need for more  
6731 intensive, multi-component programmes of longer durations (cf. Grossman &  
6732 Rhodes, 2002). Additionally, another implication is the importance of facilitators  
6733 providing follow-up support and maintaining contact with young people once the  
6734 programme is over. Such continuity of care may be particularly valuable in helping  
6735 the most disengaged young people to sustain improvements in engagement, self-  
6736 esteem, and motivation. Finally, concurring with Holland et al. (2008), providing  
6737 consistent follow-up support can prevent the common phenomenon of facilitators  
6738 forming trusting relationships with disengaged young people and then losing contact  
6739 once programmes are discontinued.

### 6740 **7.3 Strengths of the Research**

6741         There are a number of strengths within this body of research which enable it  
6742 to add to and extend the current evidence base pertaining to re-engaging disengaged  
6743 young people. First, the three studies presented within this thesis are, to my  
6744 knowledge, the first to use realist evaluation methodology to understand how, why,  
6745 and under what conditions multi-component programmes impacted the engagement,  
6746 behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes of disengaged young people. As such,  
6747 through this series of realist evaluations, new insights have been generated regarding  
6748 the contextual factors and underlying mechanisms through which multi-component  
6749 programmes worked for disengaged students and young people who were outside of  
6750 education and employment. Collectively, the refined programme theories of this  
6751 research provide an explanatory framework and a re-useable conceptual platform that  
6752 can be applied to similar programmes targeting the re-engagement of disengaged  
6753 young people and tested again to enable further theory refinement (Pawson, 2013).

6754         An additional strength of this research was the abundance of data collected  
6755 across different age groups and settings (i.e., school and community contexts). This  
6756 allowed for a thorough understanding of the contextual circumstances of schools,

6757 communities, disengaged students, and young people that facilitated and constrained  
6758 the activation of mechanisms. As such, the findings of the current research should  
6759 help programme implementers to tailor their programmes more effectively to the  
6760 different settings and ages/developmental stages of the young people involved.  
6761 Additionally, the results contribute to a growing list of strategies and practices that  
6762 can enhance disengaged students and young peoples' engagement, behavioural, and  
6763 psychosocial outcomes.

6764 Finally, another key strength of this research was the intensive fieldwork  
6765 conducted. As a participant observer throughout the TACKLE programmes and a co-  
6766 designer and facilitator of the EMPOWER programme, I was able to spend a  
6767 considerable amount of time actively participating in activities alongside young  
6768 people, observing their emotions, behaviours, and social interactions, sharing  
6769 minibus trips, lunchtime meals, and engaging in informal discussions with young  
6770 people. Over time, I developed a nuanced understanding of each young person's  
6771 background, interests, aspirations, and strengths, which served as a conduit for the  
6772 formation of caring, trusting, and supportive relationships. Consistent with most  
6773 previous studies (Borden & Serido, 2009; Liamputtong, 2007), the amount of time  
6774 spent in the field and the level of trust formed was crucial in enabling disengaged  
6775 young people to authentically share their own experiences, ideas, and perspective in  
6776 an atmosphere of familiarity and safety.

#### 6777 **7.4 Limitations of the Research**

6778 Although there are many strengths to this programme of work, the findings  
6779 should also be considered within the study limitations. Firstly, overall, although the  
6780 realist evaluation approach responds to the need to understand the mechanisms that  
6781 underlie the effectiveness of multi-component programmes, there are challenges to  
6782 conducting realist evaluations that should be taken into consideration. Specifically,  
6783 the process of identifying and distinguishing between contexts and mechanisms and  
6784 forming CMO configurations requires a considerable amount of time, creativity,  
6785 reflection, and capacity on behalf of the researcher (Dalkin et al., 2015; Gilmore,  
6786 2017). Additionally, there is limited guidance, rules, and procedures regarding the  
6787 operationalisation of realist evaluation (Adams et al., 2016; Rycroft-Malone et al.,  
6788 2010). As such, due to the exploratory nature of the approach and the lack of  
6789 standardisation, it can be difficult to assess the outputs of a realist evaluation. The

6790 effectiveness of the approach may only become clear when programme implementers  
6791 act on the findings and recommendations of the realist evaluation (Jagosh, 2019a).

6792         Secondly, there were specific limitations within the three realist evaluations  
6793 conducted. Specifically, although my role as a participant observer allowed me to  
6794 gain the trust of young people and to develop a contextual understanding of their  
6795 lives, my involvement as a programme evaluator may have increased the occurrence  
6796 of socially desirable responses. Consequently, young people may have felt reluctant  
6797 or hesitant to critique the programme during interviews, group reflections, and  
6798 informal conversations (Orchard et al., 2019). Additionally, in an effort to portray  
6799 themselves in a positive light, young people may have responded to questions in  
6800 ways that were not reflective of their true feelings and/or experiences (Doi et al.,  
6801 2015; Razavi, 2001). Thus, it is important for future research to incorporate both a  
6802 participant observer (an insider) and a non-participant observer (an outsider) to  
6803 minimise social desirability and acquiescence bias (Doi et al., 2015; Holt et al.,  
6804 2008).

6805         Finally, although this research used novel and innovative data collection  
6806 methods (e.g., ‘the talk-as-you-walk’ approach, photo-elicitation, and video-based  
6807 interviews), it was apparent that some of the young people found the one-to-one  
6808 interviews challenging due to limited social skills and/or communication difficulties.  
6809 As is often seen in research with disengaged young people (Finlay et al., 2010;  
6810 Wong, 2016), some participants were unable to verbally express and articulate their  
6811 experiences, thoughts, and feelings. In turn, this led to short responses and feelings of  
6812 discomfort among young people during the interview. Consequently, an in-depth  
6813 understanding of the impact of the programme for these specific young people was  
6814 not obtained. Future research is needed in order to examine the effectiveness of  
6815 different types of interview techniques and communication tools (e.g., props, games,  
6816 drawings, vignettes, and role play) in the context of disengaged young people (cf.  
6817 Finlay et al., 2010).

## 6818 **7.5 Recommendations for Future Research**

6819         There are a number of recommendations for future research based on the  
6820 findings from this thesis. First, although this series of realist evaluations contributes  
6821 to an understanding of how, why, and under which circumstances multi-component  
6822 programmes impacted on disengaged young peoples’ developmental outcomes,  
6823 future research is warranted to continue to examine the impact of multi-component

6824 programmes of different durations, intensities, and across different group  
6825 compositions, age groups, educational, and community contexts. This will enable  
6826 researchers to understand whether the CMO configurations and refined programmes  
6827 theories of this thesis are transferable to other settings, contexts, and age groups. This  
6828 consideration across different age groups and with programmes spanning different  
6829 lengths is particularly warranted given the findings of the current thesis, which  
6830 pointed to these contextual factors impacting upon the mechanisms that were  
6831 triggered and the outcomes that arose.

6832           Additionally, based on the findings from this thesis, it may be beneficial to  
6833 examine the effect of incorporating a series of sessions/teacher-training workshops  
6834 prior to the implementation of school-based programmes. Specifically, developing  
6835 and evaluating the impact of such workshops alone would be useful to identify the  
6836 best strategies through which to encourage school officials to share the ethos,  
6837 objectives, and vision of a strengths-based approach. Subsequently, integrating such  
6838 teacher workshops at the outset or alongside the delivery of a strengths-based  
6839 programme to students and evaluating the impact this has on student outcomes would  
6840 be extremely useful.

6841           Importantly, the current body of research was limited in its ability to examine  
6842 the long-term effects of multi-component programmes on disengaged young peoples'  
6843 engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes, and education/employment  
6844 trajectories. Although Study 2 included a longitudinal design, data were only  
6845 collected at three time points. Future research would benefit from longitudinal  
6846 designs with longer follow-up periods (i.e., 5-10 years) in order to understand if  
6847 young peoples' engagement, behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes are sustained,  
6848 and to assess whether any underlying mechanisms are triggered during the transition  
6849 from adolescence to adulthood. Specifically, when considering the focus of these  
6850 studies on encouraging re-engagement within education or training, following  
6851 participants for a sufficient period of time in which engagement in these activities  
6852 can be directly tracked would be particularly useful.

6853           Finally, despite the combination of strategies used to recruit young people  
6854 outside of education and employment to take part in the EMPOWER programme,  
6855 participation among disengaged young people remained relatively low throughout  
6856 the weeks. As such, future research which explicitly incorporates a focus on  
6857 identifying the most effective strategies to encourage disengaged young people to

6858 participate in such studies/programmes would be beneficial. Based on my  
6859 engagement with youth workers and disengaged young people at the Job Centre, I  
6860 identified several barriers that precluded young peoples' involvement in  
6861 EMPOWER, that may be considered and evaluated in future research/programmes.  
6862 Specifically, the feedback from young people included feelings of fear, anxiety, and  
6863 nervousness towards meeting new people, low-self-esteem, and issues with  
6864 transportation. Consequently, in line with the recommendations of other scholars  
6865 (Bodilly & Beckett, 2005; Plante et al., 2014), future research may investigate the  
6866 effectiveness of facilitators emphasising the uniqueness of the multi-component  
6867 programme and the opportunities/experiences that can be gained through  
6868 involvement, including testimonies of former young people in the information  
6869 sessions, encouraging disengaged young people to bring friends with them to  
6870 sessions, providing taster days and trial periods, and offering young people monetary  
6871 compensation to cover transportation costs.

## 6872 **7.6 Knowledge Translation and Dissemination Strategies**

6873         The findings of the current programme of research have highlighted a number  
6874 of novel and interesting implications for research with disengaged young people.  
6875 However, perhaps more importantly, this body of work has generated a substantial  
6876 evidence-base that can be used to enhance the development and implementation of  
6877 programmes with disengaged young people in practice. However, to ensure this  
6878 knowledge can be used by those "on the ground" effective knowledge translation and  
6879 dissemination strategies are crucial (Holt & Knight, 2014; Holt et al., 2018).  
6880 Recognising this, I have adopted a number of strategies to enhance the dissemination  
6881 of these findings to the partner organisation and other practitioners. Specifically, the  
6882 findings of the current research have been shared at academic *and practitioner*  
6883 conferences and presentations have been delivered to TACKLE stakeholders, along  
6884 with written summaries and reports.

6885         To further disseminate information to key stakeholders, I have collaborated  
6886 with a graphic designer to create an infographic (see figure 7.1) that summarised the  
6887 impact of the TACKLE programme on one student's trajectories. This infographic  
6888 has been widely used by TACKLE stakeholders both to provide feedback on the  
6889 programme, to stimulate discussion about future programmes, and to raise awareness  
6890 among facilitators regarding the individual journey/experiences of participants taking  
6891 part in the programme. Consequently, this has enhanced stakeholders buy in (and

6892 subsequent funding) of the programme, as well as increasing the knowledge and  
 6893 understanding of individuals directly involved in the programme delivery.

6894 **Figure 7.1**

6895 *TACKLE Infographic*



OSPREYS IN THE COMMUNITY





6896                    Additionally, I have also designed journey cards (see figure 7.2 for examples)  
 6897 that served as visually engaging tools to capture young peoples' experiences of the  
 6898 TACKLE and EMPOWER programme. These cards have been used to share  
 6899 information to practitioners and stakeholders, and they have been a valuable  
 6900 pedagogical strategy to encourage other disengaged young people to participate in  
 6901 the programmes.

6902 **Figure 7.2**

*TACKLE Journey Cards*



## 6903 **7.7 Personal Reflections**

6904           Through my intricate engagement with this programme of work, I have been  
6905 privileged to learn from and alongside the participants. They have trusted me with  
6906 stories of some of their most precious memories, traumatic experiences, fears,  
6907 concerns, dreams, and aspirations. I have been on a journey with the participants in  
6908 each of the studies but particularly those within the EMPOWER programme.  
6909 Reflecting upon this, I believe that I have developed some extremely important  
6910 insights regarding how best to engage with, work with, and understand disengaged  
6911 young people, which expand far beyond the findings that can be presented within the  
6912 specific studies. What follows are some of my personal reflections of delivering the  
6913 EMPOWER programme and working with disengaged young people over the past  
6914 three years. However, to provide context to these reflections, I would like to share  
6915 the motivations underlying my devotion to this research area. Specifically, I  
6916 undertook this PhD because of a desire to help disengaged young people as a result  
6917 of witnessing the negative impact of trauma and early life adversity on my own dad's  
6918 psychosocial wellbeing and functioning.

6919           My dad lived on a council housing estate in Liverpool, with his mum, four  
6920 brothers, and one sister. Growing up, he faced extremely unstable living conditions,  
6921 neglect, and economic deprivation. With limited parental guidance and supervision,  
6922 and no money to buy school uniform, my dad rarely attended school and  
6923 subsequently, never learnt how to read or write. Instead, he spent his childhood  
6924 trying to provide for his own basic needs and caring for younger siblings. However,  
6925 at the age of 14, my dad was placed into foster care. During this time, he started  
6926 associating with young offenders and found himself becoming involved in 'petty'  
6927 criminal activities. As a consequence, my dad was required to do community service  
6928 at the local leisure centre. Through engaging in community service activities, he was  
6929 able to gain valuable work experience that, in turn, proved to be a life changing  
6930 experience and a significant turning point in his life. Specifically, a duty manager at  
6931 the leisure centre had noticed my dad's work ethic, strengths, and potential, and  
6932 decided to offer him a full-time job, which he has held for over forty years.

6933           I often wonder what would have happened to my dad if he had not been given  
6934 that opportunity? What would he be doing now? My dad's story is a powerful  
6935 example of how one supportive and caring adult can transform a young person's life.  
6936 As such, my dad's experiences have inspired me to work with disengaged young

6937 people in the hope of designing effective re-engagement programmes that can help  
6938 vulnerable young people to navigate complex circumstances and to accomplish  
6939 successful education/employment trajectories. I have learnt many lessons along the  
6940 way, which I hope others can draw on to enhance their own involvement with and  
6941 empathy towards disengaged young people.

6942         Firstly, the intensive fieldwork conducted throughout my research has been  
6943 invaluable in allowing me to connect with disengaged young people and to gain their  
6944 trust and respect. Without this period of trust-building, it is unlikely that young  
6945 people would have felt safe enough to share their own ideas, thoughts, and feelings.  
6946 As such, the level of trust formed with young people has been a particularly powerful  
6947 mechanism that has contributed to positive developmental outcomes. However, in  
6948 order to develop trusting relationships with young people, I have had to adapt and  
6949 tailor my approach to meet the needs of each young person. Specifically, I spent a  
6950 considerable amount of time designing activities that were relevant and meaningful  
6951 to *each* young person's strengths, assets, and interests, recognising each person as an  
6952 individual rather than assuming that all "disengaged young people" are the same.  
6953 Additionally, I tried to empathise and understand situations from the young person's  
6954 perspective, recognising that I do not and cannot fully understand their lives or the  
6955 experiences they have had to date. Linked to this, I was extremely sensitive regarding  
6956 the conversations we had and the topics of discussion. Importantly, I also shared my  
6957 own vulnerabilities, mistakes, and failures with the young people. In doing so, I was  
6958 able to create a learning environment in which young people were more willing to  
6959 express their own experiences, take risks, and to try new things. But most  
6960 importantly, they were able to see me as an authentic person who was committed to  
6961 their development and progress.

6962         Throughout my engagement, I have realised the importance of helping  
6963 disengaged young people to identify and nurture their strengths, assets, and  
6964 competencies. In particular, by placing young people in positions of authority (e.g.,  
6965 officiating rugby matches, festivals, and tournaments), providing exposure to a  
6966 diversity of occupations and work-based placements (e.g., construction, engineering,  
6967 and police officer roles), and creating opportunities for young people to re-establish  
6968 trust and to accomplish perceivably insurmountable challenges (e.g., rock and tree  
6969 climbing), I have had the opportunity to observe young people transition from  
6970 disengagement and disaffection towards feelings of hope, passion, and optimism. For

6971 many of these young people, they have experienced years and years of negative  
6972 feedback and disparaging remarks, they have been surrounded by people who do not  
6973 believe they can or will achieve. The simple act of seeing these young people as  
6974 individuals with potential and believing they can achieve has been powerful beyond  
6975 measure.

6976 Finally, by giving voice to disengaged young people, and actively including  
6977 them in the design and delivery of their own activities, I have been able to receive  
6978 access to ideas and perspective that I had not heard or considered previously.  
6979 Overall, my experience with these young people has been a collaborative, co-  
6980 creational learning process for the young people and myself, and I have realised that  
6981 each disengaged young person is fascinating, with their own unique strengths, coping  
6982 strategies, and stories to tell. If we are to provide the very support to these young  
6983 people and produce programmes and conduct research which will truly enact change  
6984 in their lives and help them to achieve, in many cases against the toughest of odds  
6985 and experiences, it must be underpinned by a **genuine** desire to understand their  
6986 experiences and help them to experience and witness success in their future.

### 6987 **7.8 Thesis Conclusion**

6988 This research has generated new insights regarding how, why, for whom, and  
6989 in what contexts multi-component programmes impacted the engagement,  
6990 behavioural, and psychosocial outcomes of disengaged young people. Collectively,  
6991 the findings from this series of realist evaluations can help policymakers and  
6992 practitioners in tailoring programmes for disengaged young people through a  
6993 comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors and underlying mechanisms  
6994 that led to positive developmental outcomes. Future research is recommended to test  
6995 the refined programme theories of this thesis in similar programmes targeting  
6996 disengaged young people, in order to expand our understanding of how complex  
6997 multi-component programmes work and enable further theory refinement.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Guide (Students) (Study 1)**

#### **Impact of TACKLE**

- Overall, what did you think of TACKLE?
- TACKLE works differently for different students, how did the programme work for you?
- What about it has been good?
- What about it has been bad?
- What would you change? What could be better?
- How has it impacted on you as a person? Overall, do you think you have changed at all? How?
- Would you do it again? What's made you want to do it again? What's made you not want to do it again?
- What classroom sessions did you find useful? Why?
- What classroom sessions didn't you find useful? Why not?
- What did you think of the sport/practical lessons?
- What did you think of the work-based placements?
- How did you find the one-to-one mentoring?

#### **Engagement, Behaviour, and Psychosocial Outcomes**

- Has your behaviour changed in any way since taking part in TACKLE? How? In what ways? Why do you think it has or hasn't changed?
- Has your attitude towards school changed in any way?

- Since taking part in TACKLE, has there been any changes to your school attendance?
- Have the sport and physical activity sessions helped you to develop in any way? Have you developed any skills? Improved your fitness? Feel more physically competent/able?
- Have they introduced you to any new sports?
- How do you feel approaching new sports/physical activities?
- Has TACKLE impacted your confidence towards learning and schoolwork in any way?
- Do you participate in class discussions/activities during other lessons (e.g., English, Maths, and Science)?
- Would you say TACKLE has influenced your school grades?
- Has taking part in TACKLE made you feel any different about yourself?
- Has TACKLE helped you to get along better with your peers? How?
- Have you learnt any skills that have changed how you communicate/interact with others? Friends? Teachers? Parents?
- Has TACKLE helped you in your other lessons? (have you developed any skills that help you throughout your other lessons?).
- What skills do you think you have developed throughout TACKLE? (If any).

### **Realist Theories**

- Your mentor was supposed to listen, understand, and support you, how did mentoring work for you?
- Over time, mentoring may help you to trust and respect your mentor, but this is not always the case. How did you find it?
- Mentors may help you to see your own strengths, interests, and skills. How did mentoring work for you?

- Some students prefer more hands-on teaching approaches and practical experiences. What works best for you?
- Work-based placements may help some students to see what they would like to do when they finish school. How did work-based placements work for you?
- Work-based placements may help you to develop important skills that may help you to get a job in the future. Did they help you to develop any important skills?
- Through all of the different sports and physical activities, TACKLE was supposed to help you develop leadership and teamwork skills, how did the sports work for you?
- Do you think it is possible to transfer the skills learnt in sport into other areas?
- How did you feel listening to the rugby player? Some students may find the rugby player's talk inspiring and it may motivate them to work harder in school, but others may not feel inspired and may not work harder. How did it work for you?
- Some students may prefer a mixture of activities/modalities (e.g., mentoring, classroom, work-based placements, and sport), others may not. How did you find all of the different modalities? Some students find that it provides access to more support from different types of people. Did it work that way for you?
- TACKLE facilitators try to genuinely care for and believe in you. Was this the case for you? Did you feel cared for? Did you feel that TACKLE facilitators believed in you?
- For some students, the behaviour management policy may motivate them to behave in order to be able to attend the TACKLE programme. For others, it may not. Why do you think this may be? And how did it work for you?

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Guide (Teachers) (Study 1)**

#### **Impact of TACKLE**

- Overall, what did you think of the project?
- What did you like most and least about it?
- What changes in students, if any, have you seen?
- What lessons/sessions do you think have impacted on students the most?
- What did you think of the classroom lessons? Which ones were useful?
- What would you change? What could be better?
- What did you think of the sport/practical lessons?
- What did you think of the work-based placements?
- What did you think of the mentoring? How did it work?
- How would you describe the delivery of the TACKLE programme? (focus on facilitators and constraints).
- Overall, how could the TACKLE programme be improved?

#### **Engagement, Behavioural, and Psychosocial Outcomes (realist theories)**

- Have you seen any changes in students' behaviour since taking part in TACKLE? In what ways? Have there been any changes in the number of discipline referrals? How do you think the behaviour management policy worked for each student?
- The mentor was supposed to listen, empathise, understand, and support the student. How do you think mentoring worked for each student?
- Do you think students developed trust and respect for their mentor? If not, why not? Why do you think some students might not have developed trust?

- Would you say students attitudes towards school have changed in any way? Why? Why not?
- How do you think the professional athlete influenced students? Why do you think the athlete impacted students differently?
- Do you think the work-based placements helped students to develop a vision for their future?
- Why do you think the work-based placements may have worked differently for some students?
- Have you noticed any changes in students' level of engagement during core subject lessons?
- Would you say TACKLE has had any impact on how students participate during core subject lessons? (e.g., how they participate during class discussions/activities).
- Have there been any changes in students' attendance since taking part in TACKLE?
- Have you noticed any changes in terms of how students approach sports/practical lessons?
- Would you say TACKLE has helped students within their other lessons? How? Why do you think it has/hasn't?
- Have you noticed any improvements in students' grades? (Academic performance).
- Has TACKLE changed how students communicate/interact with others? Peers? Teachers? Parents?
- Do you think students have developed any skills throughout the project? If so, have these skills being transferred to any other areas? Why? Why not?
- What do you think about the combination of different modalities? How has this exposure to various modalities worked (or not) for students?
- How would you describe the ethos of the TACKLE facilitators?

- Overall, how, and why do you think TACKLE has impacted on each student?