

C11 Denbig 2 Wednesday 5 December 14.15 - 14.45

Achieving Excellence by Helping More Students to Get On – Trialling New Tools to Demonstrate What Works (0355)

Caroline Wilson¹, Christine Broughan¹, Sandeep Gakhal¹ ¹*Coventry University, United Kingdom*

This research focuses on a project examining support to students transitioning to university from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and from ethnic minority groups known to achieve less well than their peers, even when controlling for prior attainment (Mountford-Zimdars, Sabri, Moore, Sanders, & Hiagham, 2015). Successful interventions (and their scaling up) have the potential to reduce this persisting disparity. The new regulatory body for HE in England, the Office for Students (OfS), has a sharp focus on what happens after such students gain access – “It’s not just about getting in, it’s about getting on, too” (Millward, 2018).

Students from such backgrounds are less likely to feel supported and encouraged (Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2015) and less likely to engage with available advice and guidance (Hoyne & Mcnaught, 2013). This indicates that the sector needs to do more to provide equity of access to engagement support. While student engagement support can draw from sociological, social network, organisational, psychological, cultural, pedagogic and economic research (Kuh, 2006) engagement research predominantly focuses on learning and teaching environments (Zepke, 2014). There is scope to draw again on psychology and conceptualise student engagement activities as focussed attempts to encourage positive behaviours, and to frame and organise them in the same way as we might for smoking reduction, safe driving, and positive environmental actions.

This work offers the opportunity to learn from a more advanced development of holistic behaviour change frameworks incorporating both policy, institutional, and individual behaviours, and from disciplines already associated with this type of conceptualisation. We report on the first known combined use of the Theoretical Domains Framework (TDF) and Behaviour Change Techniques (BCTs) taxonomy to categorise a suite of student engagement interventions in HE, using the case study of a project involving a consortium of universities in the West Midlands of the UK.

The TDF takes 128 key theoretical constructs related to what encourages or discourages behaviour change and synthesises them into a single framework of 14 domains (Cane, O’Connor, & Michie, 2012). These domains include both the individual capacities of the student, and outside influences such as environmental or organisational barriers and levers. The TDF promises a theoretical basis to behavioural interventions which is both comprehensive and accessible to non-psychologists (Dyson & Cowdell, 2014; Taylor, Parveen, Robins, Slater, & Lawton, 2013). The TDF has been used for a range of objectives, including identifying influences on behaviours, intervention design, intervention evaluation, and to provide intervention guidance (Atkins et al., 2017). Relevant to this research, it is also advocated that it could also be used as a component in an examination of the relationships between theoretical domains and mechanisms of change (Atkins et al., 2017).

The second of these new tools, the BCT taxonomy, was created in response to research indicating that the effects behaviour change interventions can be variable, with high likelihood of failure or minimal impact (Michie et al., 2016). A starting point to remedy this is to specify interventions in greater detail and with more consistent terminology (Michie et al., 2013). A Delphi panel of behaviour change experts identified and clustered the ‘active ingredient’, or behaviour change technique (BCT) used in interventions (acknowledging that an intervention may use more than one) (Michie et al., 2013). The resulting taxonomy of 93 distinct BCTs promises a ‘step change’ as a method for specifying interventions (Michie et al., 2013, p. 81).

The TDF and BCT were applied to the interventions of the OfS part-funded DRIVER project (2017-19), which has eight HE or FE partners looking to improve successful transition from secondary to tertiary education. Each partner committed to using the TDF to document their interventions. Two members of the team with a social psychology background then used the BCT to further codify each intervention, and this coding was confirmed in a workshop with all partners.

The purpose of using these new tools is to look for patterns of intervention adoption, and to compare with experiences in other sectors about which interventions best address which determinants. It further seeks to develop and encourage a common vocabulary frequently missing in descriptions of student engagement interventions (Wilson, Broughan, & Marselle, 2018) but which are argued to be necessary to ensure scalability and 'faithful adoption' of successful interventions in other settings (Abraham & Michie, 2008, p. 380).

So far this research has supported HE practitioners to engage with the logic chain concept of evaluation being used by OfS, which follows a 'chain' of thinking from problem identification through to impact. The TDF elicited deep engagement with identification of the 'problem'. Identifying the 'active ingredient', or BCT, used in interventions has enabled partners to more easily identify evidence to measure impact. The research further led to a realisation among partners that some interventions were insufficient on their own to achieve categorisation, for instance when they did not lead to an identifiable behaviour change associated with improved outcomes for students. Some interventions were then dropped or merged.

Ongoing work to be reported in December reflects on our analysis across the project of using the TDF to identify which behavioural domains are most commonly targeted (e.g. do we focus more on the capacities of the student, or on removing environmental or organisational barriers?). We will also identify whether there is a pattern of particular TDF domains being routinely addressed by the same BCTs, and whether there are omissions in HE intervention activity compared with other sectors engaged in focussed attempts to change behaviour. Crucially, the research will feed into the evaluation of the project's various interventions and identify which are most effective at supporting the transition of students who are currently less likely to achieve their full potential. The results will contribute to the growing ontology (Michie et al., 2016) around how to successfully support behaviour change, acknowledging that this work is very much a starting point for use of the TDF and BCT in a student engagement context and that further research will be required before this method of framing and taxonomising of interventions can routinely predict likely success.

References

- Abraham, C., & Michie, S. (2008). A taxonomy of behavior change techniques used in interventions. *Health Psychology : Official Journal of the Division of Health Psychology, American Psychological Association*, 27(3), 379–387. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0278-6133.27.3.379>
- Atkins, L., Francis, J., Islam, R., O'Connor, D., Patey, A., Ivers, N., ... Michie, S. (2017). A guide to using the Theoretical Domains Framework of behaviour change to investigate implementation problems. *Implementation Science*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-017-0605-9>
- Cane, J., O'Connor, D., & Michie, S. (2012). Validation of the theoretical domains framework for use in behaviour change and implementation research. *Implementation Science : IS*, 7(1), 37. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-7-37>
- Dyson, J., & Cowdell, F. (2014). Development and psychometric testing of the "Motivation and Self-Efficacy in Early Detection of Skin Lesions" index. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 70(12), 2952–2963. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.12436>
- Hoynes, G., & McNaught, K. (2013). Understanding the psychology of seeking support to increase

- Health Science student engagement in academic support services: A practice report. *International Journal for First Year in Higher Education*, 4(1), 109–116.
<https://doi.org/10.5204/intjfyhe.v4i1.149>
- Kuh, G. D. (2006). What Matters to Student Success : A Review of the Literature Spearheading a Dialog on Student Success. *Commissioned Report for the National Symposium on Postsecondary Student Success Spearheading a Dialog on Student Success*, 18(July), 156. Retrieved from <http://cpe.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/AFA304F0-C125-40C2-96E5-7A8C98915797/0/WhatMatterstoStudentSuccessAReviewoftheLiterature.pdf>
- Michie, S., Carey, R. N., Johnston, M., Rothman, A. J., de Bruin, M., Kelly, M. P., & Connell, L. E. (2016). From Theory-Inspired to Theory-Based Interventions: A Protocol for Developing and Testing a Methodology for Linking Behaviour Change Techniques to Theoretical Mechanisms of Action. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12160-016-9816-6>
- Michie, S., Richardson, M., Johnston, M., Abraham, C., Francis, J., Hardeman, W., ... Wood, C. E. (2013). The behavior change technique taxonomy (v1) of 93 hierarchically clustered techniques: Building an international consensus for the reporting of behavior change interventions. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine : A Publication of the Society of Behavioral Medicine*, 46(1), 81–95. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12160-013-9486-6>
- Millward, C. (2018). Getting in and getting on: access and participation in the Office for Students. Retrieved June 21, 2018, from <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/getting-in-and-getting-on-access-and-participation-in-the-office-for-students/>
- Mountford-Zimdars, A., Sabri, D., Moore, J., Sanders, J., & Hiagham, L. (2015). Causes of Differences in Student Outcomes. *Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)*, (July), 132. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.585710>
- Taylor, N., Parveen, S., Robins, V., Slater, B., & Lawton, R. (2013). Development and initial validation of the Influences on Patient Safety Behaviours Questionnaire. *Implementation Science : IS*, 8(1), 81. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-8-81>
- Wilson, C., Broughan, C., & Marselle, M. (2018). A new framework for the design and evaluation of a learning institution's student engagement activities. *Studies in Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1469123>
- Zepke, N. (2014). Student engagement research in higher education: questioning an academic orthodoxy, 19(6), 697–708. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2014.901956>

