

EDUCATIONAL JOURNEYS
AND CHANGING LIVES

BARBARA MERRILL & JOSÉ GONZÁLEZ MONTEAGUDO (EDS.)

EDUCATIONAL JOURNEYS
AND CHANGING LIVES

ADULT STUDENT EXPERIENCES

VOLUMEN I

BARBARA MERRILL & JOSÉ GONZÁLEZ MONTEAGUDO (EDS.)

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ESREA
European Society for Research
on the Education of Adults



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INTRODUCTION TO EDUCATIONAL JOURNEYS AND CHANGING LIVES

Barbara Merrill and José González Monteagudo

Adult students are engaged in a wide range of educational journeys in diverse settings across Europe and beyond as illustrated by the chapters in this book. Participation in education and lifelong learning often has a profound effect on the self and identity by changing the lives of learners and sometimes those of their family (West 1996, Merrill, 1999, Ryan, 2001). Over the last few years the value of widening participation in adult, community, further and higher education has been stressed by highlighting the social and economic benefits for individuals, communities and nations. Besides the instrumental benefits of earning more or getting a better job, participation in education contributes to personal development, identity, familial and community life, social networks and citizenship (Archer, Hutchings & Ross, 2003). The educational journeys as experienced by adult students are not always, however, straightforward (Crossan et al, 2003) as adults have many things going on in their lives. As a result their learning career may not be linear but instead characterised by setbacks as internal (institutional, learning issues) and external (family, health, work) factors come into play. Most adults undertake several roles such as student, parent, worker, carer and it is sometimes difficult to juggle these and keep on going as an adult student. However, many do succeed with their studies and develop a learner identity and many get 'hooked' onto learning and once they start they progress to other learning programmes and further studies.

The chapters in this book reflect the wide nature of adult and lifelong learning taking place both in formal learning institutions (further and higher education, adult education, community education, and the workplace) and informally in civic society, for example. Adult education has become, as Edwards (1997) describes it, a 'moorland' with the boundaries of where learning takes place blurring. Sometimes in this moorland roles are reversed as adult education tutors may also become learners themselves as they return to the 'classroom' for professional development to reflect upon their practitioner identity. The notion of identity is also a central theme of this book. Learning careers and identities are shaped by class, gender, ethnicity, disability, age and cultures.

The Story of this Book

The European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA) provides opportunities for adult educators from across Europe to meet, discuss and exchange research ideas. The chapters in this book are as a result of one of its networks holding a conference. ESREA has several research networks covering

a range of adult education topics. This book has developed from the work of the ESREA Access, Learning Careers and Identities Network and the meeting of researchers from across Europe to discuss their research at Seville, Spain in December 2008. The life history of this network reflects the changing nature of research in this field. This network started its life in 1996 as the Access Research Network and held its first network conference in Leeds, UK. The convenors were Chris Duke, Etienne Bourgeois and Barbara Merrill. As the publication – *Access, Equity, Participation and Organisational Change* - (Hill & Merrill, 1997) from the conference illustrates the theme of the network was a narrow one focusing only on higher education, access and participation. This focus dominated the themes of the next two network conferences in Barcelona and Edinburgh.

Ten years later the network was re-launched under its new title of Access, Learning Careers and Identities to reflect the new and wider concerns in adult education research around the concepts of identity and learning experiences and processes. The emphasis was no longer on getting in and accessing an institution. The new network held its first network conference at Louvain –la- Neuve, Belgium in 2006. As a result of a sharing of research and ideas at Louvain –la- Neuve a book was published as part of the ESREA/ Peter Lang series entitled *Learning to Change? The Role of Identity and Learning Careers in Adult Education* (2009). Until the Seville network conference the meetings had been of a modest size with everyone listening to each other's paper. The Seville conference attracted a large number of people (about eighty) from across Europe and from North and South America. The Access, Learning Careers and Identities network meets and holds a conference every two years travelling to different sites around Europe.

Looking at the Chapters

This book, because of the number of chapters, has been divided into two volumes. Volume one covers the following topics: non traditional adult students studying largely in higher education; broader issues of learning in further and higher education; issues of gender, class, ethnicity and community; and literacy. Volume two covers research on professional, vocational learning and work as well as papers discussed at two round tables. The chapters reflect a range of cultural contexts and countries in relation to research but there is a lot of similarity in the experiences of adult learners within and beyond Europe. This book tries to convey a complex picture of the plurality of contents, approaches and methods which are being employed by researchers, lecturers, teachers, educators and community workers. The methods used are rooted in qualitative research traditions, particularly action research, in depth interviews, ethnography and life history approaches (Merrill & West, 2009; González Monteagudo, 2008). It is interesting to highlight the importance of theoretical and epistemological contributions in many of the papers published here. The book reflects the growing internationalisation of research within a social context of globalisation and educational challenges which go beyond national contexts. In this sense this type of networking activity is very important. The development of the diverse ESREA networks over the last years illustrate the value of collaborating and sharing in the European and international context.

New problems and challenges arise for researchers and educators working in an international perspective. The cultural, national and linguistic differences are relevant. Nevertheless we try to create a common space of cooperation in order to share our work while at the same time promoting plural ways of communication to avoid marginalisation and isolation.

The first section of volume one includes nine chapters which focus on the experiences of non-traditional adult students in higher education, with contributions coming from Sweden, Scotland, England, Spain and Portugal. Higher education institutions, despite widening access opportunities, remain largely geared towards the needs of 'traditional' younger students. Adult students from working class backgrounds, for example, can feel out of place or like a 'fish out of water', particularly in traditional, elite universities. Some of the papers look at issues of access in relation to policy and practice from the perspective of non-traditional students. Other authors discuss how adult students develop a learner identity and the processes involved and how the learner identity may change over time.

There are seven chapters in the second section which look at adults learning and issues of identity in the further and adult education sectors. These papers have been written by researchers from Germany, England, Spain, Portugal, Poland and Norway. (Further education institutions in the UK deliver post compulsory education. Many of their students are adults. They also offer higher education programmes in partnership with universities).

Section three includes nine chapters, exploring issues of inequality such as gender, ethnicity and class and community education. The authors are from Wales, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Spain, Scotland, Canada and England. Many of the authors focus on marginalised groups in society. Section four consists of two papers on adult literacy, coming from Scotland and Chile.

Volume two focuses on interests and issues relating to professional and vocational learning and work. There are thirteen chapters in this section, written by contributors from Germany, Japan, England, Scotland, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Norway, Finland, Sweden. Some of the chapters discuss the process of learning and identity in the workplace while others look at programmes on professional development, particularly for teachers, in higher education institutions. This includes examining how professional identities are constructed. The final section is devoted to papers presented in two round table sessions; one on the life histories and learning processes of psychology degree students and the other on language, identity and learning experiences of adults.

Acknowledgements

As editors we thank all the participants at the Conference of the Access, Learning Careers and Identities ESREA network, undertaken in Seville in December 2008, for their contributions during the Conference and the papers published here. This has made it possible to gather almost fifty contributions coming from twenty countries which show the value, diversity and social relevance of experiences, projects, schemes and research activity in the fields and contents covered in this publication.

This book has been made possible by the generous funding coming from the University of Seville. Professor Lourdes Munduate, Pro-Vicechancellor of International Relationships at this University, granted the financial help necessary to publish this book. We are very grateful for her support both for the preparation of the research Conference celebrated in Seville in December 2008 and for the edition of this book.

Tribute to Dr Isabel López Górriz

Finally we would like to remember our colleague of the University of Seville, Dr. Isabel López Górriz, co-ordinator of one of the round-tables. She died suddenly in Seville several weeks after her participation at the Conference of December 2008. Particularly for one of us (José González Monteagudo), she was a close colleague, very inspirational and passionate for her teaching, research and community activism. Her loss was and continues to be very sad. We pay here a tribute to her legacy in fields such as action research, biographical approaches and experiential learning.

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**I. HIGHER EDUCATION AND
NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS**

1. LEARNING JOURNEY AS A WAY OF LIFE AND A THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE

Agnieszka Bron

Learning is intimately connected with life. We learn as long as we live, we get experiences and knowledge during the whole of our lives. Therefore, it is nothing strange to look at learning as a journey, as a process, and as such to study it. Many social scientists use a biographical approach to get to this process and to understand it. The aim of this article is to give examples of adults' learning as a way of their lives. Why are they consciously involved in learning? What is the driving force? What creates a natural thirst for knowledge? I want to look at a relationship between leaning and biography. Learning does not mean only a positive thing, that by getting more knowledge and experience we are happier. Just the opposite, emotions are also involved in our identity creation, and learning contributes to identity formation and identity change. Two examples of thirst for knowledge will be presented in this chapter. The first is an individual and contemporary story of a learner who cannot stop studying, who is obsessed with learning. The second is a collective and historical story about involvement in formal and non-formal learning by women and men who were denied access to education. This chapter presents two historical cases of collective thirst of knowledge, one from England and one from Sweden. After that I will problematise learning by using the concept of biographical learning and of floating, both to analyse and understand the individual story as well as the collective story. I will come back in the end of the article to the issue of what creates a natural thirst for knowledge, what circumstances are there?

An Individual story

The story of Anna, who gained a record in Swedish higher education by collecting the most credits ever, is an interesting opening for this article. Anna is not a 'professional student', i.e. someone who is continuously studying and not being able to decide what to do with her life, like a 'patchworker'. On the contrary, she is a full-time employee of FOSS, a Danish-Swedish Company dealing with chemicals, nutraceuticals, petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals, polymers and plastics, pulp and paper, textiles and tobacco. Anna works in the developmental section, using analytical instruments for picture analysis and spectroscopy.

Anna is 39 years old and still a student. Currently she is taking an advanced course in Italian by distance learning and part-time. She has a BS in Chemical Technology, a Master's degree in English, and a Master's degree in Economy. She studied 37 disciplines, among others languages, history, statistics, business law, psychology and microbiology. She has gained 1,041 credits, and in Sweden

30 credits means one term. She can do it because the system allows everybody who is eligible for higher education to apply for free courses without limits. Moreover higher education is free of charge and there are no restrictions as far as age is concerned. For the last fourteen years she was studying and working full time. It also means that it is possible, for some, to combine work with learning. Anna is single; she has two dogs, and lives with her mother. In her leisure, she is watching TV and reads books for pleasure.

Why did she start to study in the first place? Anna does not come from an academic home, and her parents never went to university, but her father loved to read books and came home with books from the library, and she still recalls that books had a specific aroma that she liked so much. What is more, she is interested in everything, she wants to know all. As a young person, she was not keen to learn, a secondary technical programme would do, she thought. Perhaps there was no expectation from her family to continue, but it turned out to be different. A friend encouraged her to apply for an engineering programme at the university, and she was accepted second time around and stayed there for good. In the beginning it was Lund University, and later Anna studied at different universities and colleges. Often she takes distance learning, so she chooses what suits her best.

She works and studies, getting up early in the morning to be ready with all assignments in Italian, the subject of her recent interest. But right now she is also redecorating her flat. How is this possible to do all these things? How is she managing? She is using all free moments to read, she became a fast reader, and she is very disciplined and is curious. From where does her energy to study come? She does not think in these terms, but just does things. Learning became an addiction, but she is aware that sometimes she would like to have less demanding studies and she takes them easy. She does not remember all she has learnt, of course, as this is not at all important. However, she does not like to study only superficially, i.e. as a beginner but she likes to go in-depth in each of the disciplines, thus she continues to the next level. When she was granted her first degree, she got a job, but the problem was that her job did not give her enough intellectual challenge and stimuli; therefore she applied for free courses, as it is still possible in Sweden, and she is continuously studying different subjects.

Obviously the portrait of Anna that I have just presented indicates that if we start learning formally, we cannot stop. We want to know more and more, and we are probably not happy with what we already know. As our perspective changes biographically so does the knowledge. In Anna's story we can see the thirst of knowledge, a thirst for knowing. She cannot stop learning, and she wants more and more. Learning becomes a habit, it is habitual –it orders her way of life. Successful learners continue to learn. But isn't it strange that she is continuously learning? One possible question is if her identity has changed because of learning? Does she have several identities? Does she have a learning career? What about her experiences as a learner? These are empirical questions which certainly need to be explored. They become crucial and more general questions if we take into consideration drop-outs and delays in studies.¹

¹ See European Lifelong Learning Project: *Access and Retention: Experiences of Non-traditional Learners in HE* in which the author is involved.

Learning as a life project

Learning can be approached as a life project or as a life task, but it seems only if it is a conscious project as we have seen in Anna's story. Often learning is following us in our lives. It is all the experiences we are getting. Learning takes place in formal and informal situations. Formal situations are included in the biographical plan people make. When we look at the stories adults tell us, we can distinguish the formal situation as important parts of their life courses. Informal learning is easier to find out about when people are telling their stories. When Alan Tough (1971) did his study on adults' learning projects it was through narrative interviews so that he could come to the projects which otherwise would not be discovered through the traditional survey research. But is learning an individual issue? Do we learn individually or socially with others? Again biographical research can give us some answers, but also we get support from theories. In our research on *Reflective, independent learning of mature students* we discovered through the life stories we collected the complexity of learning. The stories challenged the idea of "contemporary higher education discourse that learners are unique and individual persons who learn in a specific and distinct way without being affected by others" (Lönnheden & Bron, 2006). In other words learning is a social issue, we learn by being together and from each other. We learn as individuals, but the character of our learning is inter-subjective².

Barbara Merrill in her life history research brings attention to women and class by drawing on feminist but also symbolic interactionist approaches. She goes beyond the individual and focuses on learning strategies that are common for women coming from working class background and different ethnicity/race and learning in higher education. By using biographies she illustrates the inter-relationship between private and public lives, the dialectics of agency and structure and the linking of individual biographies to the collective (Merrill, 1999). Obviously gender and class are issues that may constrain the possibilities to learn for many adults. And yet there are women and men who have made a difference in their lives through involvement in popular education. Therefore it is interesting to look back to history and find out, especially about women, the way to learning revealed in their collective stories. People always learned, were curious and questioning of the world around them and about all the unusual things that happen around them and in themselves.

Collective story

Dream about access to general and technical/vocational knowledge

A thirst for knowledge as a collective issue can be traced to the beginning of liberal adult education i.e. to the eighteenth and nineteenth century in many countries in Europe. I just want to concentrate on two countries: England and

² See the project: Promotion Reflective and Independent Learning in Higher Education - PRILHE, (Socrates Grundtvig project 113869-CP-1-2004-1-UK-GRUNDTVIG-G1)

Sweden. Beliefs in the role and power of knowledge were not uncommon for people of the eighteenth or nineteenth century in Europe. The issues of liberal (popular) adult education as well as an interest in natural sciences and technology were on the agenda. This was connected with the thirst for knowledge that people had. Moreover the early adult education activities contributed to growth of democracy (Simon 1985; Bron, 2002).

In 18th century England, in addition to public lectures in literature and art, science with experiments and demonstration became very popular. It had its impact mostly on the educated classes. Interest in natural science was in part professional and reflected a growth of industry and the demand for technological improvement, especially among males. Many new societies that focused on technology emerged with the start of the coffee-houses (which were places for early adult education). There was a fascination with science which resulted in public lectures becoming widespread. One of the other reasons was inadequacy of public educational system in the area of teaching applied sciences. According to Kelly (1962: 114), 'science for the working classes was being associated in the public mind with scepticism, radicalism, and the French Revolution'. Officially the establishment of the Mechanics' institutes was described as the political aspiration of the working class. This, however, cannot be underestimated according to Kelly. There was a need for better educated workmen in a period of rapid technological change. In fact, it was mostly the skilled craftsmen that needed knowledge of new inventions, new processes and materials, and it was to this group that institutes were addressed. Clearly, institutes responded to their members' thirst for knowledge and played an important role in organising the working class towards political and educational work. But there were other institutions as well.

'University Extension came as a gift from heaven'. Thus wrote one early female student, Kelly (ibid. 227). The term University Extension appeared first in the 1840s, and meant primarily the extension of facilities for full-time students. In the narrow sense, however, it meant facilities for part-time university education as a part of this wider movement. The University of Cambridge started the formal work of University Extension in 1873, in its modern sense, 'and arose out of two specific demands' (ibid. 219). First, was a demand for university education for working men; the other was higher education for women. The latter coincided with the need for training and qualifications of female teachers (connected with the secondary school reform). A Council to promote such education was established and it was thanks to the initiative of some of the ladies' groups that James Stuart, a young fellow of Cambridge's Trinity College, delivered four lecture-courses in autumn 1867. Courses, each based on eight lectures, were provided in Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield, and Manchester to the audience of predominately women teachers. Women's original request was for the theory and methods of education, but this could not be provided and instead Stuart lectured on the History of Science. This was quite a difficult subject for anyone without formal education. However, the hunger for knowledge was stronger and women were listening to Stuart with enthusiasm. Each time 300 women came. Between the years 1893-94, for example, there were over 60,000 students attending Extension courses in various parts of the country. The same happened in Scotland as Extension work started because of women's education (ibid.).

By paying attention to needs of women, according to Kelly, this was the most valuable features of Extension work. From the very beginning adult education had been a man's world and women were either excluded or admitted with reluctance to other institutions. Furthermore the movement had great significance for adult education, for the universities themselves, and for the nation at large (ibid.). It provided for the needs of women, and partly had the character of the university approach to work (syllabus, written examination in the form of an essay, and tutoring were new methodological tools). The university clearly restated the concept of liberal study. Nevertheless, it did not neglect the vocational needs of the students, but at the same time, the study was undertaken in a spirit of humanity, and basic values as well keeping the purposes of human life faithfully in mind. 'Thereby the universities established a tradition of liberal study which has ever since been the distinctive mark and special pride of English adult education' (ibid. 237). Moreover they contributed to the liberation of women.

The role of University Extension furthermore was to popularise the idea of university as such, which was little known and understood. University lecturers like missionaries came 'into contact with men and women of all social classes from every corner of the country'. Extension summer meetings brought many people face to face, and 'scholars learned that life has lessons which books cannot teach' (ibid. 237).

Knowledge is power: The Swedish Social Movements and Study Circles

During the latter part of the 18th century, social and economic changes had already started to take place in England, while in Sweden they began in the next century. It is, however, possible to trace educational work of the Enlightenment's societies and clubs in Sweden back to the 18th century. The literary clubs/societies and academies of literature and science served the educated people, who were recruited not only from the nobility but also and mostly from the new middle class. However, 18th century Enlightenment did not accomplish anything for the people's enlightenment. To establish a popular school for all children still remained the most important goal and we had to wait until the 19th century to find adult education directed towards the whole population, especially in the form of social movements (Bron 2002).

Indirectly the Reformation contributed to adult education. A Church Law from 1686 decreed that literacy work was obligatory to conduct in the whole country. The priest's responsibility in each parish was to visit all households and examine its members both in terms of reading and moral progress. Reading was thus obligatory but any kind of discussion was forbidden. An examination in reading began in Sweden at the end of the 17th century and lasted until the end of the 19th century (Ambjörnsson, 1987). This of course gradually created a climate for using reading skills for other purposes and resulted in the demand for more education. Sweden introduced compulsory schooling in 1842 in each parish in the form of folk school and a library for adults.

Popular social movements which developed in Sweden in the 19th century and which became stronger at the beginning of 20th century are often recognised as a

counter-culture or protest movements as they were organised by common people themselves. The protest was directed against the state Church, state policy and economy by movements of three kinds: the Free Church's, the Temperance's and the Workers' movement (later a trade union). Movements used in their work learning to motivate their members, preparing them for social action and change, as well as forming democracy in the group. (Johansson, 1981). Everything took place relatively quick in a period of 70 years, from 1850 to 1920.

Movements integrated a wide strata of people. In 1920 the three largest movements (of the Free Church, the temperance, and the workers) had 830,000 members (ibid. 227). This means that together with the youngsters they constituted about one third of Sweden's population. Towns and industrial regions were mostly receptive, but there were also many people from the countryside who played an important role in developing the movements. Interestingly, more women (two thirds) than men entered the Free Church associations. Men represented usually small scale manufacturers, farmers and skilled workers. In the beginning the lowest social class participated, but gradually this widened to other social classes. The farmers' participation grew as time went by. Women were recruited from the lower social strata to a much higher extent than men, but these gave the congregations lower social status. A similar situation occurred for the Temperance movement especially in the beginning when the proportion of women was much lower. The Trade Unions attracted skilled workers at first, i.e. upper working class men. But generally they were the same social groups who entered into all the three movements. Both the social pressure and urbanisation were very apparent factors for joining the movements (ibid.).

The movements' educational activities were characterised to a large extent by pluralism. The main differences were in the content, but their forms were unified. All movements' activities began with reading and discussion. Finally such discussions resulted in study circles. The establishment of study circles was due to a pragmatic purpose. There was simply a lack of qualified teachers or educated leaders who could run lectures for thousands of members who were not concentrated in one place. The practical solution was to organise activity groups who met around a topic or a book, and the group could choose a leader from among themselves to run the discussion. The basis for this arrangement was equality among members. Thus, the movements' educational work was mostly formed in reading groups –the famous Swedish study circles. Later the leadership was taken over by educational associations with roots in the workers', temperance and religious movements. The first study circle was organised by the Temperance Movement in 1902 and later set the model for the popular adult education typical for Sweden. Oskar Olsson, a Parliament member for the Social Democrats and a lecturer at the Teacher Training College in Linköping, and Ellen Key, who was famous abroad for her ideas on fostering children, were the first members of the very first study circle in Lund.

The first independent educational association, ABF (Workers' Educational Association), was built in 1912 on the basis of the labour movement. Other popular movements followed suit, and by the late 1940s there were 13 approved educational associations in Sweden all running study circles. Although study circles dominated the activities of associations, they also included lectures,

cultural programmes and library services. They were subsidised to some extent by the public according to the Parliament decision in 1912, which was directed towards both libraries and study circles.

By 1920 the movements gradually changed their tactics when the goals of transforming society were achieved. This could be easily seen in the subjects studied at the study circles. In the beginning subjects were useful for the movements and connected with the movements themselves: working class issues, studying bible or knowing about the danger of alcoholism, negotiations techniques, social legislation, economics, and general questions of democracy dominated. Since 1920 there was a visible change towards more leisure oriented subjects with aesthetic and liberal kind of education. Popular education became an alternative to the state elementary and higher education. In addition to being an alternative to elementary and higher education, popular (liberal) education became the only way, for a great number of people, to continue their education after six years folk school. Their thirst for knowledge could be satisfied.

Individual and collective floating

There are many questions which come to an adult educationist's mind while telling these stories: In what sense is learning desirable? Is learning important? Is learning practical? What kind of learning? When, where, how? And for whom, an individual or/and the collective?

We live and we learn. We learn because we live. Is this so simple? Can we think about life as a learning project, as a journey that has its beginning and its end? The day we are born we start to learn even if we cannot recall and memorise our experiences (Horsdal, 2008). From the beginning it is very exciting, challenging and interesting when we discover our environment. To explore the social world around us step by step, literary by learning to move, to touch and to walk, and mentally as well as emotionally to understand others and later on ourselves, is something that all of us go through. This we are doing both by using our bodies and minds and by using all our senses. Gradually by experiencing, doing, creating, constructing and thinking we get knowledge about the closest world, the others and ourselves. But this knowledge because of our biographies is changing and we are able to shape our lives again and again (Alheit, 1995). To know about what we are doing and what we have done, but even what we are learning and what have we learnt we reflect biographically and we reflect on ourselves. Reflection is possible when we tell our story (Brunner,1990).

But if life is the same as learning, can we at all separate learning from life, from living? How can we know about life and about learning? How can we break up learning from life and vice versa? This would not be a problem if we see learning as a cognitive process, but because it is also a bodily process and our cognition is embedded in it and depends on a context or a situation, it will be nearly impossible to separate learning from life.

Getting knowledge about learning, and especially adult learning is possible through biographies when we are involved in biographical research. Biographical research is a methodology and approach that adult educationists

use predominantly but not only (see West et al. 2007). One talks about auto/biographical turn in adult education research. Most of the learning theories in adulthood are based on biographical research (Jack Mezirow's, Peter Alheit's, Peter Jarvis', Agnieszka Bron's and others). Using social science theories like constructivism and social constructionism, phenomenology and ethnomethodology, and symbolic interactionism adult educationists approach the life world of adults' learners. They use gender studies methodology, grounded theory or psychosocial and psychodynamic methodologies and make in-depth analysis to understand how and why adults learn.

According to Alheit (1995) knowledge is gained through biographical learning. There is no any other knowledge than biographical. Generally speaking, construction and reconstruction of knowledge is merely possible through biographical work. As such knowledge is always connected to our biographies and incorporated with ourselves. Knowledge is transitional thus changeable and dependent on our biographies, and means reflection as well as self-reflection upon biographical experiences. Does knowledge and learning shapes also collective biographies? If yes, in what directions? Is it possible to find out in the collective stories the impact of all the generations who participated in English University Extension or in Swedish study circles on the society at large? I will concentrate on these questions but let me first write some words on Anna's case, the individual.

In the process of life we get and we make different experiences, we are also exposed to different actions and situations that are taking place. They all affect our biographical learning and can contribute to shaping our lives in a new configuration(s). When we look at Anna's life –the individual story I presented at the beginning of this article– we can think about how her learning affects her life. We can see how people are struggling with life and how they use learning in their struggle. In life stories collected from different adults (immigrants, non-traditional students, and academic teachers) I discovered a process of floating when they are in between and have to make a decision about what to do next with their lives (Bron, 2000). Can Anna's life be characterised as in floating, is she in floating?

Floating occurs among others when we are insecure with our own knowledge, or our knowing. Often we experience that knowing more means knowing less. We can be under a constant psychological stress because what we already knew is no longer true or it is not valid. Is Ann's desire for knowledge connected with her knowing more? Is her addiction for learning a sort of mechanical approach and/or is her desire to know authentic? In other words is she floating or is she accumulating credits? Sometimes we face psychological stress when we are between cultures, we are floating in uncertainty; we feel disempowered. As learners we experienced a new culture e.g. academic culture as unknown, unfamiliar and strange. It seems that Anna feels very well in the academic culture that she adapted to, but she chooses distance courses in which she does not have contact with others. She does not feel well in her job, her work does not give her satisfaction. Is learning a rescue in her life?

We feel that our task is to make and remake self-identity. Floating comes as unexpected which can re-emerged when the new circumstances occur. The best way to describe floating is the feeling of being fragmented, not having a

past and being afraid to form or plan the future. This is a typical situation for those who are floating. Our lives are not such as they used to be. Structuring and planning one's own life is suddenly challenged.

Mature students especially those without academic experiences and those coming from non-academic homes experience floating. It may conjure a metaphor of being on the sea in a boat that one cannot steer or is unable to do so. The boat can go in several directions, controlling it is difficult as one drifts all the time, but also because a person is being unable to decide what direction s/he wants to take or choose. One cannot escape from the boat in other words one is condemned to drifting unless the solution or decision is reached.

In Anna's case it seems that she is floating in her learning, she graduated in several subjects, but she still takes courses. She has been caught in the learning, in the thirst of knowledge. Her life seems to be disturbed by learning, she is addicted to learning. What consequence does her floating have for her life, however, is an empirical question. We know that Anna's life concentrates on work and learning –but learning gets priorities. She can study continuously because of higher education being on offer that one can study whatever course without age limit. Anna's way for floating is unusual, or is it really? For mature students coming to learning in higher education and experiencing floating means that it emerges gradually and something has to be done to function towards self and others. A new sense of identity has to be created (see Giddens, 1991). Non-traditional students face difficulties to discover and uncover social and cultural codes that are characteristic in the institutions they are learning. Socialisation to a new culture directs them to the symmetry between objective and subjective realities, and between the objective and subjective identity. Language is the fundament as well as the instrument for socially created reality (Mead, 1934, Joas, 1997). They are struggling to avoid dislocation, they want to belong. In the world of higher education Anna found her place, her location. This is her experience, her being.

Looking at the collective stories and collective biographical learning we can see that shared floating meant access to learning, a desire for whole groups who were denied learning to participate and use knowledge. It was a collective floating for learning, for access, and the motive was similar as in the individual story, i.e. a thirst for knowledge. But the outcome was different. While individual thirst for knowledge resulted in addiction, the collective thirst for knowledge empowered those who participated. Through University Extension mature women and men get access to university studies, new universities were established, and a new methodology of teaching was possible. Higher education became more open, and adult education could flourish. They also contributed to establishment of Workers Educational Association and played an important role in workers movement and women movements.

In the case of Sweden social movements contributed, through their educational work, to civil society development; they prepared adults to execute power in a democratic state; and create space for self learning. The study circles have today almost two and a half million participants. The secret of the Swedish study circle lies in its external and internal democracy. External

democracy includes such attributes as free and voluntary participation, open access, and subsidies from the state. The internal democracy means lack of a common curriculum, few restrictions on the local decision-making, diversity of content, plurality of ideas, no exams or certificates, and leaders who still can be chosen from the group. Such external and internal democracy can play a part in adults' awareness and participation in civil society as well as to deliberations, i.e. citizens' engagement in communication democracy (see Larsson 2001; Bron & Talerud 2005; Bron, A. & Moeschlin R. 2007).

Thirst for knowledge

Today, in many European countries women outnumber men in higher education generally and in humanities particularly. What is more we see many mature students in higher education. Thirdly, university is an example of how university extension in England and how liberal education in many countries opened the path for women to learn. Formal learning becomes a way of life often for pleasure and not for qualifications or a job. One gets addicted to learning as long as one lives and universities are a place also for older ladies and gentlemen.

The last question worth asking is what creates a natural thirst for knowledge? Is there anything like a natural thirst for knowledge? If we answer affirmatively then we can think about factors which stimulate that thirst or hamper it, or we can think about conditions that make thirst for knowledge possible. Surely individual dispositions can be one of such factors or conditions. Individual dispositions for learning are at least two: i.e. curiosity to know, discover, understand etc. and addiction to know, i.e. not being able to stop being curious. Learning becomes a habit or a strategy to live a life, to survive crisis and misfortune by solving problems. However, there can be a contradictory reaction too; often a big crisis or trauma makes it impossible to learn novel things, to concentrate, to remember, to do things etc. Another factor includes societal values and expectations – if people in our surrounding are against continuously learning and especially on the formal level the natural curiosity can be hampered. To value learning highly is thus a condition for our involvement in it. Do our closest ones i.e. parents, spouses, friends and colleagues at school and at work expect from us that we learn? The time we live in now creates conditions for learning such as cultural, societal, technological that give us an opportunity to know better and more. This we can feel on both general, i.e. societal level (that whole generations learn) but also on particular, i.e. individual level (that we learn as individuals). Furthermore, we need to have the opportunity to fulfil our thirst for knowledge –if such opportunities are missing it can be difficult and will very much depend on individual disposition. Thus good conditions and circumstances will bring more possibilities to learn.

We can see in the two examples presented in this article that thirst for knowledge can be an individual and collective drive for learning. The collective outcomes are obvious –there is possibility to change society through people's learning towards a democratic way of life, the individual outcomes are more complicated– they can result in addiction to learn, to be in a learning floating, but also to find in learning the way of life.

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2. TOWARDS A SUFFICIENCY MODEL IN TEACHING NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

John Bamber

Introduction

This paper connects with wider concerns in the United Kingdom about widening access to Higher Education (HE). In a study for the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Gibbs (2001: 6) notes that although widening access was a priority for 27 per cent of pre-1992 universities, methods to achieve this tended to focus on mechanisms to provide access, such as collaboration with nearby colleges, rather than any associated change in teaching and learning processes once the students had entered. A more recent HEFCE report, *Review of Widening Participation Research: Addressing the Barriers to Participation in Higher Education*, highlights how different discourses of widening participation inform government policy and interventions. According to the report's authors (Gorard et al., 2006: 121), these include:

- An access discourse, focusing on raising the aspirations of a few gifted and talented working-class students to enter the 'top' institutions.
- A utilitarian discourse focusing on getting more people into HE to serve the needs of the economy by providing pre-entry support, supplementary study skills and vocationally relevant programmes.
- A transformative discourse of widening participation through broader engagement and institutional change.

The report states that a 'more explicit understanding of widening participation is required. This is likely to include who is to be targeted, whose responsibility it is, whether all institutions should play the same role, and whether it is institutions or individuals that are required to change' (ibid: 121). The authors call for a shift away from prevailing deficit models of non-traditional students, and that widening participation policy and practice need to address not just access to HE –which has been the focus of much national and institutional policy-making in recent years– but also the experience these students have in HE (ibid: 119-120).

In previous research (for example Bamber et al., 1997; Bamber, 2000; and Bamber et al., 2006), my focus was on the students' experience of 'crisis', understood as a keenly felt personal predicament requiring resolution, as they struggled with the demands of academe. I identified the roots of the problem in terms of four deep-set concerns on their part: a feeling of not being entitled to participate in HE, disinclination towards academic study, having a simplistic understanding of the theory-practice nexus, and an instrumental attitude to gaining a professional qualification. I now think that their experience can better be understood as a requirement for full and productive engagement in the subject area, and in the following discussion, I consider what such engagement could look like with respect to my own degree programme. To set the context, I explain briefly about the field of practice that these students are being trained for. I then

explain key elements of the training programme in terms of its aims and methods, before turning to a discussion of its characteristic ways of thinking and practicing. After this I briefly discuss how social constructivist ideas can usefully inform thinking about the sorts of teaching and learning processes that could reconcile the educational needs of students, on the one hand, with the learning objectives of the programme on the other. I conclude by intimating the kind of theoretical underpinning that would be needed to support appropriate curricular strategies.

The field of practice

At the outset, it is necessary to say something about the relationship between the terms ‘community learning and development’ (CLD) and ‘community education’, as both relate to the same field of practice. There is insufficient space for a detailed explanation, but here it may be briefly stated that Community Education Services were established in all local authorities in Scotland following the 1975 Alexander Report. These Services brought together youth and community work and adult education. In 1998 the Osler Report argued that community education was best understood as a process, a way of working with people using informal methods and social groupwork. Osler argued that it was more effective to encourage the development of this process in a wide range of services and agencies including, for example, schools, housing associations and libraries. The title Community Learning and Development was introduced more accurately to reflect this wider field. Osler was persuasive with the Scottish Executive and has led over time to the disappearance of discrete Community Education Services in Scotland. The situation today is confusing as the main training agencies retain the term community education in their degree titles, and a body known as Community Education Validation and Endorsement still professionally endorses these programmes. Key policy documents also refer to CLD as a process in much the same way as they used to refer to community education. The following excerpt is from the Scottish Executive’s (2004: 1) most recent guidance on community learning and development - *Working and Learning Together to Build Stronger Communities* (WALT):

“Community learning and development is a way of listening and of working with people. We define this as informal learning and social development work with individuals and groups in their communities. The aim of this work is to strengthen communities by improving people’s knowledge, skills and confidence, organisational ability and resources. Community learning and development makes an important contribution towards promoting lifelong learning, social inclusion and active citizenship.”

The same document states that CLD:

- Respects the individual and the right to self-determination.
- Respects and values pluralism.
- Values equality and develops anti-discriminatory practice.
- Encourages collective action and collaborative working relationships.
- Promotes learning as a lifelong process.
- Encourages a participating democracy.

In its guidelines, Community Education Validation and Endorsement (CeVe, 1995) Scotland, now a sub-committee of the recently established CLD Standards Council, notes that these values should themselves be reflected 'at the level of the operating principles' of practice. Providers should, for example, encourage equality of opportunity, positive action and open access particularly for disadvantaged learners, place emphasis on learning as well as teaching and seek to match the content and manner of delivery to the needs of the people concerned. To some extent, these injunctions mirror the call made by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Quin et al, 2005), for HE institutions to provide an appropriate curriculum for working-class students that reflects and affirms their background and to develop pedagogy that supports student integration and learning.

A particular view of professionalism is captured in the CeVe competence framework that currently governs endorsement for initial qualifying programmes in the field. Professional community educators are said to be able to:

- Engage with the community.
- Develop relevant learning and educational opportunities.
- Empower the participants.
- Organise and manage resources.
- Practise community education within different settings.
- Use evaluative data to assess and implement appropriate changes.

The framework has been criticised by McCulloch and Martin (1997), for being too reliant on an instrumental view of competence (the ability to do/perform), when there is an equal need to include critical understanding (the capacity to make sense of relevant ideas and concepts) and contextual awareness (sensitivity to the issues raised in relation to the wider context). Their more expansive view of competence represents the staff team's critical perspective on developments in the field. While the thrust of these developments is noted the programme continues to emphasise the educational role of the worker.

Ways of thinking and practising in the subject area

Whilst acknowledging the professional view for training purposes, the programme goes beyond this to engage with ideological and theoretical questions about the role of community education and of the community educator. Policy is not taken as a given but something to be critiqued within a particular historical and political context. The move to community learning and development, for example, has been consistently scrutinised in terms of perceived threats to the ways of working formerly enshrined in core community education approaches. There is an emphasis on critical thinking in relation to social policy, the social order and developments in the field of practice that runs throughout the programme. Although there is a pronounced emphasis on the development of intellectual capacities such as synthesis and evaluation, theory and practice are not separated but linked together dynamically in the curriculum. This linking is clearly evident in the highlighted elements of the following explanation of the role of the final placement in third year (MHSE, 2005: 8-9):

“The final placement is designed to give students the opportunity to operate at a relatively sophisticated level of activity as a pre-professional colleague. This means they require the opportunity to work with an increasing degree

of autonomy. They should be able to contextualise the work of the agency and to make judgements about constraints and possibilities. They should be able to develop and articulate a conceptual framework within which to plan, implement and evaluate particular practice. They should be able to select, justify and deploy appropriate methods of intervention.”

The nature and purpose of the programme is succinctly expressed in its stated learning objectives, which are to (MHSE, 2005: 5):

- a) Develop the student’s critical understanding of the nature and purpose of community education practice in a range of settings.
- b) Enable students to locate their work as educators in the context of community, policy and society.
- c) Enable students to engage effectively with individuals, groups and communities and to select, justify and develop appropriate learning and educational opportunities.
- d) Enable students to be self-monitoring in the sense that they adopt a critical approach to their own professional performance and to that of the agency or organisation in which they practice.
- e) Enable students to become professionals capable of co-operating with colleagues and across professional boundaries.
- f) Cultivate the intellectual and other capacities that characterise the educated professional.
- g) Foster in students a commitment to their continuing intellectual and professional development.

In effect, the above statement of learning objectives goes some considerable way to describing the ways of thinking and practising in the subject area. Although team members hold differing views, these ways are premised upon agreement around the fundamental purpose of community education that underpins the programme. In broad terms this may be described as supporting a Scottish social democratic tradition that emphasises the active involvement of citizens in decision-making in their social, economic and cultural life. Tett (2002: 96) has described this as:

“...promoting their free and equal participation, in both defining the problems to be addressed and the solutions to be used, in ways that mitigate economic and social inequalities. It requires a public space in which different groups can come together to air their differences and build solidarity around common interests.”

This social democratic perspective inevitably informs the way in which the staff team have constructed the programme’s content. The notion of public space to which Tett refers has a particular significance for the argument in this paper. Put briefly, if practitioners are to create public spaces in the field, they need first to have learned during their course of study why this is important and how to do it.

At the same time, the programme is underpinned by a critical approach to theory, policy and practice. According to Boud (in Weil and McGill, 1989: 42), being critical means:

“Allowing one’s ideas to be criticized by others, exploring one’s appreciation of the limitations placed on one’s consciousness by historical and social circumstances, and being prepared to change one’s approach as such awareness creates a new framework within which to act.”

It is about reflecting inwardly, as part of a total reaction to making sense of a situation where learning involves delving into one's own starting points and a priori assumptions. Cognitive activity alone, however, does not fully account for the ways of thinking and practicing in the subject area because there are also emotional, behavioural and existential aspects. How people practice, in other words, depends to a crucial degree on the kind of people they are in terms, for example, of their beliefs, values, preferences, predilections and habitual ways of responding to problems (Usher and Bryant, 1989: 76).

This understanding of ways of thinking and practising in the subject area implies an expansive notion of competence whereby the combination of intellectual, practical and personal elements connotes the concept of the critically competent community educator. While the aims are clear, there is an equal need for clarity about the manner in which teaching and learning strategies are meant to secure the programme's aims. A lack of clarity could indicate, and even bring about, a disjuncture between aims and means, and in what follows I tentatively construct a theoretical basis for an appropriate pedagogical response to the student experience of crisis.

Seeking congruence in teaching and learning

One way of understanding the curriculum issues at play in this case is to appreciate the influence of the ethos underpinning particular programmes. As already explained the programme team promote the kind of criticality that is consistent with progressive social and political change through linking education and social action. Ares (2006: 7) notes that there is a tendency in critical pedagogies to foreground the political whilst situated and socio-cultural learning theories emphasise the process:

“In critical theories, transformative practice refers to a stance regarding the *aims* of teaching and learning, specifically the political, social, and economic empowerment of oppressed peoples (whereas) a socio-cultural perspective typically refers to a particular stance regarding the *nature* of learning, as transformation of participation. Learning is a consequence of acting with and within a community of practice, as individuals' knowledge, skills, and identity as members of the community change.”

Bringing these critical and socio-cultural perspectives together can help educators better to understand the processes by which transformative practice can be fulfilled in classrooms, and to develop ways of incorporating students' diverse cultures and languages as resources for teaching and learning. McCune and Hounsell's (2004) work on congruence, is helpful in thinking about approaches to teaching community education as it suggests that the meaning of criticality must be understood in terms of the ways of thinking and practising in this particular subject area. The issue, however, is not simply about 'what' constitutes criticality but also 'how' students are socialised into being critical. This is important because, 'without a foundational theory of learning, teachers lack an anchoring framework for translating thought into action' (Ares, 2006: 4). The default position is then taken by the conventional I-R-E pattern involving teacher initiation, student response and teacher evaluation. The issue of congruence between the programme's aims and its teaching and learning processes can be usefully considered with reference to a transformative approach based on social

constructivist theories and the mutual pursuit of understanding. This means focussing attention on the interactive and inter-subjective relations between students and between students and teachers. It means moving away from a paradigm that is consistent with psychological theories and their attendant focus on individual students, and the transmission and acquisition of knowledge.

According to Thanasoulas (2002), constructivists take an interdisciplinary perspective by drawing upon a diversity of psychological, sociological, philosophical and critical educational theories. The aim is to construct ‘an overarching theory that attempts to reconstruct past and present teaching and learning theories, trying to shed light on the learner as an important agent in the learning process, rather than in wresting the power from the teacher’ (ibid). In drawing from a range of theoretical perspectives social constructivists understand learning primarily as a social process in which learners are motivated partly by the rewards provided by the knowledge community (GSI, 2006). Because learners actively construct knowledge, learning also depends to a significant extent on the drive to understand and to engage with the learning process. For social constructivists, therefore, the motivation to learn is both extrinsic and intrinsic.

In terms of motivation, it is useful to acknowledge Vygotsky’s (1896 – 1934) well-known distinction between actual and potential development. The first is the level that the learner has already reached and at which he or she is able to solve problems independently. The level of potential development, or ‘zone of proximal development’, is a higher level that involves nascent cognitive structures that can only mature under the guidance of teachers or in collaboration with others. The nature or structure of this guidance, however, is crucial in terms of securing a transformational learning outcome. Bencze (2005) takes up this point about guidance in noting that students ‘see what they want to see’, which means that it is more than likely that they will ‘discover’ what is apparent to them as distinct from what would be apparent to an expert in a particular field. Neither can they change their thinking on their own even if they wanted to because they lack understanding of the relevant laws or theories that are available to them. Because experience alone is not enough, he argues that students need to receive different ‘lenses’ embedded in different laws and theories, through which to view objects and events, to design tests or to interpret data. Moreover, it is disadvantaged students who are least likely to ‘discover’ important ideas and so on from enquiry or discovery because they may lack the required skills or experience of this form of learning. The implication is that educators need to carefully present and structure learning situations so that students engage with the required ideas or skills. I now turn to this educational challenge by considering the implications for teaching and learning when the four ‘crises’ are interpreted more positively as signalling a requirement for full and productive engagement in the subject area.

Constructing a theory of sufficiency

These social constructivist ideas can usefully inform thinking about the sorts of teaching and learning processes that could reconcile the educational needs of the featured non-traditional students on the one hand and the learning objectives of the programme on the other. The conditional nature of this last statement is a reminder, however, about not simply adopting existing models and ideas in rethinking teaching community education. There is a need for a rigorous theoretical analysis to make sense of and justify the suggested activity

in relation to this or any other programme. With regard to my own subject area, the student's need to feel that they have something valuable to contribute, for example, corresponds to those aspects of the curriculum that require students to bring their own life or work experience to bear on topics covered in classroom discussions. To fully meet this need however, it would be necessary to convey the message that those experiences are essential to learning in this programme. Ultimately, this means consistent involvement in collective and collaborative forms of learning. A theory of collaborative activity in teaching and learning processes would assist understanding in this respect.

Being disinclined towards academic study on the basis that it seems unrelated to a student's own perception of the 'real world' of practice, to take another example, raises questions about the need for learning that is relevant to the student's concerns, questions and interests concerning community education. The need for relevance is matched by the programme's aims that the students should be able to select and deploy appropriate intellectual arguments and methods in the resolution of practice problems. Thinking through the sorts of issues that would be involved in factoring the criterion of relevance into teaching and learning processes, would be assisted by a theory of knowledge as the product of argumentation in which students participate in a mutual process of constructing and defending their own positions.

Similarly, the simplistic understanding of the theory-practice nexus foregrounds the issue of what it means to develop as well as to acquire theory. There is a correspondence here to the programme's aim to produce critical practitioners and the requirement in terms of teaching and learning processes is to develop the capacity for critical thinkers overtly and actively. A theory of discourse, understood as a means of questioning ideas and actions at the level of fundamental premises, could support thinking in relation to this task. By the same token, having an instrumental attitude to gaining a professional qualification signals the need to consider the competence required of practitioners, which, in turn, connects with the programme's concept of professionalism as a way of being. Here the requirement is that the programme's teaching and learning processes actively develop the attributes of competence that are central to being professional. Thinking about this requirement would be facilitated by a more expansive theory of competence that synthesizes the necessary professional and academic knowledge, skills and attitudes, together with a more explicit focus on how competence is developed through reflective and reflexive processes.

The relationship between the crises, their implicit resolution, learning objectives, corollaries for teaching and learning and the need for a rigorous theoretical analysis, can be summarized and set out schematically below in Table 1. In effect, the elements are constitutive of a nascent theory of sufficiency as a basis for working with non-traditional students in HE. In listing the active participation of students in learning, demonstrating the relevance of study to the student's concerns, actively developing the capacity for critical practice and the attributes of professionalism, the third column indicates important areas for teaching and learning processes in terms of achieving the programme's learning objectives. Effectively this means framing the students' educational needs in terms of the programme's aim to produce critically competent community educators. The elements of a theoretical underpinning that could support such a development are set out in the fifth column.

Table 1: Constructing a sufficiency theory in working with non-traditional students

Deficit Model	Sufficiency Model	Programme aims	Teaching and learning requirement	Theoretical rationale
Feeling unentitled to participate in HE	Students have something valuable to contribute from their own experience	Use of life and work experience in teaching situations	The active participation of students in learning	Collaborative learning
Disinclination towards academic study	Subject matter should acknowledge the need to be relevant to their issues, concerns and interests	Students should be able to select and deploy appropriate intellectual arguments and methods	Demonstrating the relevance of study to the student's concerns, questions and interests about community education	Knowledge construction
Having a simplistic understanding of the theory-practice nexus	It is important to develop their own ideas and understanding as well as to 'receive' theory	To produce critically competent practitioners	Overtly and actively developing the capacity for critical practice	Argumentation
Having an instrumental attitude to gaining a professional qualification	They have a legitimate need to develop competence appropriate to the field of practice	The concept of professionalism as a way of being	Actively developing the capacity for reflection and reflexivity	Competence

Reconstructing the learning experiences of the featured students in terms of educational needs, and establishing a correspondence between these and the programme's aims, leads to thinking about the issue of congruence between the two. A social constructivist perspective could usefully inform development in this direction. Habermas (2003: 34) has built on the social constructivist tradition by taking from Piaget (1896 – 1980) and Kohlberg (1927 – 1987) the understanding that knowledge construction can be analysed as a product of learning processes, that learning can be seen as a process of problem-solving in which the learning subject is active, and that the learning process is guided by the insights of those who are directly involved. From Vygotsky (1896 – 1934) he has also understood the importance of the peer group in learning and the role played by the group in helping individuals to move beyond the limits of what they are capable of doing or understanding alone. He has incorporated these understandings into his theory of communicative action and more work is needed on how this theory can assist thinking about a critical approach to teaching and learning in community education by providing a coherent theory of collaboration, knowledge development, criticality and competence.

Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to rethink the experience of crisis amongst non-traditional students featured in my previous research. McCune and Hounsell's (2004) work has been helpful in moving beyond narrow conceptions of experience as subjective, psychological and individualistic. Their work has shown that students come into particular discipline and subject areas, rather than into HE in

any general sense. The student experience is inextricably concerned, therefore, with learning the ways of thinking and practising inscribed in these areas. This observation encouraged me to focus on the specifics of teaching and learning processes in the BA in Community Education. With this in mind, my interest in the experience of the featured students crystallised into the pedagogical problem of how to reconcile their educational needs with the programme's aim to produce critically competent community educators. Rethinking the issues from a social constructivist perspective intimated the theoretical contours of a 'sufficiency' model of working with non-traditional in HE.

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3. 'FITTING IN OR COOLING OUT? VOCATIONAL LEARNERS IN A TRADITIONAL UNIVERSITY –NOTES TOWARDS A RESEARCH METHODOLOGY'

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Introduction

This paper draws on the early stages of a research project about 'vocational learners' and their interactions with staff and systems in the setting of The University of Sheffield (TUOS): a 'traditional' university in the UK. The project is funded via a Lifelong Learning Network (LLN) entitled 'Higher Futures', in South Yorkshire in Northern England. In particular, we consider the methodological options and implications associated with this type of research, in this type of policy-oriented context; we identify a number of potentially ambiguous and challenging issues, and propose a study design that may help to address these. We write as members of an interdisciplinary team, drawing on research backgrounds in educational research, social and health policy, sociology, arts and humanities.

The paper opens with an overview of the theoretical and policy context for our research project. Following this, we describe the process of developing a specific research design, drawing on the 'Mosaic' principles and incorporating aspects of biographical-narrative interviewing and visual methods. We propose to locate the study within two contrasting university faculties, and present a justification for this and for the suggested sampling strategy. We argue that this approach builds on the critiques that have been developed in a number of recent studies (e.g. Warren and Webb, 2007): that is, our study design lays the basis for an exploration of the ways in which specific identities and trajectories (for learners, but also for tutors and other HE staff) are constructed, questioned and reconstructed through the interactions between learners, educators, systems and policy contexts.

Background

Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) were launched in England in 2005, within a four-year programme of national government funding for partnerships between further education and higher education providers at local and regional levels.¹ They form part of an array of current UK government initiatives in secondary, further and higher education, which seek to improve collaboration across sector boundaries and to increase the numbers of people gaining university-level

¹ For full details, see the national and regional websites: <http://www.lifelonglearningnetworks.org.uk/> and <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/higherfutures/about/index.html>

qualifications (Watson, 2005). In particular, these initiatives have set out to increase HE participation levels among social groups who have been seen as under-represented to date, including young people and adults with 'vocational' rather than 'academic' qualifications.

Within these few lines, we have already begged a number of questions: where do we place the boundary between 'vocational' and 'academic', for example, and what do we mean when we describe the university under consideration here, perhaps euphemistically, as 'traditional'? Initial desk research uncovered a dearth of definitions of the term 'vocational learner' within policy documentation, but a clearer focus on defining vocational *qualifications*. For the purpose of this study, we have adopted the definition (Little et al. 2008) provided in a recent national interim evaluation by the Centre for Higher Education Research & Information (CHERI) for English Lifelong Learning networks:

".... vocational learners are broadly conceived as i) those whose post-16 educational pathway leads to qualifications other than A levels, ii) work-based learners and iii) adults already in the workplace."

Vocational learners, therefore, are not a homogenous population, and we return to this point in more detail later. Our reference to locating our study in a 'traditional' university signposts a different but related set of issues. Although there is no longer a formal distinction between more 'vocationally-oriented' polytechnics and more traditionally 'academic' universities in the UK, the HE sector is still characterised by informal divisions that reflect a history of polarisation between academic and vocational emphases. Thus the 'post-92' universities (the former polytechnics) have a stronger track record in recruiting vocational learners than the 'old' or 'traditional' universities, which commonly also refer to themselves as 'research-led' –thus reinforcing the polarisation in some respects.

The Higher Futures LLN, like others, seeks to understand and address the specific factors that affect vocational learners' levels of access to, and participation in, degree-level programmes at university. As in many traditional or 'pre-1992' universities in the United Kingdom, the numbers of students entering TUOS through vocational routes are low when compared to entrants who hold the post-16 qualifications normally gained at school or college (typically 'A' levels or the International Baccalaureate). For example, in 2007 a total of 62 students were accepted into the university on the basis of the vocational 'BTEC' qualification², compared to 3622 via the A level route³. This is only one illustration of the overall pattern, however, since not all 'vocational' learners who transfer to university do so via the BTEC route. We return to this point below, in the discussion of our proposed sampling strategy.

Theoretical context

As indicated above, we are a mixed team in terms of disciplines and intellectual points of departure. For some team members, the intellectual

² BTEC National qualifications (Award, Certificate, Diploma) provide an alternative to A-levels in England and Wales for the 16-19 age group, and were first taught in 2002.

³ A-level qualifications are the conventional entry route into HE and focus on traditional study skills. They normally take two years to complete full-time in school or college.

reference points are drawn from Bourdieu, with the aim of developing a critical space from which to question dominant, taken-for-granted ideas (or *doxa*) within current HE policy and research. For example, Warren and Webb (2007) examine the ways in which neo-liberal education policies in the UK construct the ‘responsible learner’: the individual who is expected to exercise rational choice in the education marketplace, pursuing learning opportunities that will enhance his or her employability in the context of (partially) globalised labour markets. Warren and Webb argue for a research focus on ‘habitus’, paying attention to learners’ own narratives about their life histories and ‘learning careers’, but –crucially– locating these within broader ‘fields of social practice’ (within institutions, communities and policy processes).

For others, the key reference points are based on feminist scholarship. Williams (2001), among others, has examined the ways in which New Labour social policy in the UK has continued to promote social inclusion and participation via formal education, training and employment –reproducing gendered assumptions, through a marginalisation of formal and informal ‘care’ work and an inflexible picture of lifecourse transitions. Allied to these perspectives is a concept of human agency as complex and multi-faceted: not based on the idea of the unitary and supremely rational self, but on a recognition that sometimes ‘we might feel that one part of ourselves has decided something and that another part is fighting against it’ (Craib, 1992: 172, quoted in Hoggett, 2001). In a critique of the notion of the ‘reflexive agent’ developed by Giddens and others, Hoggett argues that agency is not always ‘reflexive’: we are not always able to articulate clearly why we do things. Nor is lack of agency necessarily ‘unreflexive’: we may experience powerlessness, for example in relation to experiences of poverty or violence, but still be able to maintain a painful awareness and understanding of that position.

Lastly, for some in the team, the point of departure is an interest in notions of ‘capability’ in relation to learning. Walker (2008) and Robeyns (2006) have explored the application of Sen’s (1997) and Nussbaum’s (2000) notion of capabilities to educational policy and practice. Here, education is valued for its all round impact on learners’ capabilities –all their “beings” and “doings”. This is a powerful antidote to the prevailing views that value education solely for its impact on employment and employability.

In discussion, we have identified a number of areas in which these different perspectives converge. First, we view ‘structure’ as reproduced through daily practices: these include the discourses we use to describe learners and learning processes ourselves (vocational, academic, working-class, marginalised...), as well as the ways in which learners, HE staff and others interact, making and implementing plans and decisions. That is, we seek to avoid a crude polarisation of ‘structure’ and ‘agency’. Second, we see strong parallels between patterns of ‘responsibilisation’ and moral regulation in HE and related developments in the linked domains of welfare provision and social policy. Our concern here is that while government policy does acknowledge evidence of entrenched socio-economic inequalities, a focus on individual ‘choice’ and responsibility tends to downplay the role of the state in shaping both educational resources and ‘the production of individual dispositions and, more precisely, of systems of individual preferences’ (Bourdieu, 2005: 16, cited in Warren and Webb, 2007).

Against this background, we identify a number of salient points in recent empirical research on vocational learners and HE in the UK. Watson (2005: 191-2) notes that 90% of students with two or more A levels go on to higher education, but that only 45% of those with vocational qualifications at this level do so. Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) explore the ways in which moves towards a mass HE system have been accompanied by discourses of 'dumbing down', and by notions of 'non-traditional' students – including those with vocational qualifications – who remain marked as 'other' in comparison with an assumed, pre-existing norm. In pursuing a project based on the participation of 'vocational learners', are we simply reproducing that process of 'othering'? In discussing our proposed study design, we indicate a number of ways in which we have tried to address this concern. In this connection, we also draw on the work of Crossan et al (2003), who have explored the concept of 'learning career' in order to 'shed light on the complex interplay between the social and economic structures which shape people's lives, the educational institutions which determine the processes of engagement with learning, and the learners themselves' (Crossan et al, 2003: 58). This resonates with the work of the Transforming Learning Cultures project which has developed the concept of 'learning cultures' (James et al, 2007). Its importance lies in the way it captures the dynamic interaction between personal biographies, institutional practice, policy context and social-structural factors such as gender, class, race and ethnicity (Colley et al, 2003; Colley, 2006).

Lastly, one recent internal study has examined some aspects of the experience of a group of vocational learners at TUOS who fit the first aspect of the CHERI definition, those with the BTEC qualification mentioned above (University of Sheffield, 2006). Apart from confirming that overall numbers were very small, the study recommended a number of improvements in the exchange of information between providers of BTEC qualifications and TUOS, as well as improvements to advice and guidance to learners (both at the pre-application stage and once admitted). In many ways this study set the scene for our own study: it identified a number of important issues, but was also limited by a small sample size and by its 'snapshot' nature. Drawing on the ideas and the empirical research briefly outlined above, the research questions we intend to explore are:

- 1) How are vocational learners defined in TUOS, by staff and in central and departmental admissions systems?
- 2) What are the numbers and locations of vocational learners within undergraduate programmes in the Faculties of Medicine and Engineering at TUOS?
- 3) What are the pathways through which vocational learners have arrived at TUOS, and how are these influenced by past learning experiences, formal and informal advice, social and family networks and other biographical factors?
- 4) What are the ways in which vocational learners and HE staff describe their current experiences of learning within TUOS?

- 5) What are vocational learners' and TUOS staff members' views about the factors facilitating and/or hindering transitions into TUOS from vocational learning contexts?
- 6) What are vocational learners' and TUOS staff members' views about policy and practice (in HE and in TUOS in particular), in relation to access pathways and support processes for vocational learners?

Vocational learners in a traditional university

This paper is, in part, the culmination of 'thinking sessions' in which the team has attempted to place under critical scrutiny the taken for granted terms of 'vocational' 'academic' and 'traditional university'. An examination of the relevant literature and policy documentation has revealed the 'fuzziness' of attempted categorization in this field, not least the differentiation between 'vocational' and 'non-traditional' learners. Schuetze and Slowey (2002) identify three criteria as central to the definition of non-traditional learners: educational biography, entry routes and mode of study.

We will investigate how far these factors are central to the definition of vocational learners at TUOS. Using the CHERI definition as a guide, we found that central admissions staff can easily provide information on some 'vocational learners' –for example those holding BTEC diplomas– because data from UCAS⁴ clearly identifies learners on the basis of entry qualifications. However, as Nixon et al (2006) have highlighted, current systems do not facilitate any more detailed identification of learner pathways into HE. We are working with admissions staff to find ways of identifying –for example– those undergraduate learners who are full-time and who may be supported by their employers, as well as part-time students who may be work-based⁵. In addition, mature learners⁶ and those who have entered TUOS via access routes⁷ can also be identified. At the time of writing this paper, data was being prepared to include all these identifiable categories for 2006, 2007 and 2008. This data will enable the team to map the location and specific entry qualifications of vocational learners within TUOS and to select a sample of study participants.

In addition to seeking clarification on *who* might be included in the study, team members also sought to answer the question '*where* should we site the research activities?' Which faculty, which departments, which courses should

⁴ The national 'universities and colleges admissions service' which processes applications for HE entry.

⁵ Foundation Degrees are degree level qualifications designed with employers; they commonly combine academic study with workplace learning.

⁶ That is, those aged over 21 at 1st October in their year of entry to HE.

⁷ Access to HE courses offer a route into higher education (HE) for those who do not have the educational qualifications which are usually required for entry to HE. These courses provide the underpinning knowledge and skills needed for university-level study, and lead to the award of the Access to HE qualification, which is of an equivalent standard to Level 3 qualifications, such as A levels.

be included? As a first step, we looked at data on BTEC entrants, the largest easily identifiable group:

Faculty	2006 BTEC applications	2006 BTEC accepted	2007 BTEC applications	2007BTEC Accepted
Arts	44	3	51	5
Social Sciences	107	9	167	11
Law	21	4	38	5
Architectural Studies	41	4	67	6
Pure Science	113	14	141	11
Engineering	150	18	197	22
Medicine	19	1	38	2
Total	495	53	699	62

Table 1. BTEC applications and entrants in 2006 and 2007
(Source: Student Recruitment, Admissions and Marketing, TUOS)

The highest number of BTEC learners (still very small numbers in relation to A-level applicants) accepted by the university are in the Faculty of Engineering. The lowest numbers are in the Medical Faculty. However, we are still awaiting data relating to two additional groups of vocational learners: part-time learners (who may well be combining study with full- or part-time employment); and full- and part-time learners who have gained places with an 'access' qualification. An initial analysis of the BTEC data suggests that the Faculty of Engineering and the Medical Faculty could provide two locations where vocational learners might be constructed in very different ways. A further rationale for selecting these faculties is that they contain courses relating to the Higher Futures priority sectors and, as such, they are engaged in developing progression routes and support mechanisms for vocational and work-based learners.

Given our concerns over reinforcing 'othering' processes, we want to approach vocational learners sensitively. Admissions staff recommended working with Student Services, and the proposal is for an email to be sent out by that department to all undergraduate learners within our two chosen faculties who fall within the groups we have defined as 'vocational'. The email will give brief information about our research and invite learners to 'opt out' if they do not wish their contact details to be passed on to us. All those willing to take part will then be invited to complete a short email questionnaire. This will provide some basic demographic and entry route data, and will identify those willing to take part in more in-depth qualitative work. In a fairly small project, our emphasis is to prioritise depth of investigation over breadth of reach. Therefore a sample of approximately 6 learners will be selected, 3 from the Faculty of Engineering and 3 from the Faculty of Medicine. Final selection will be dependent upon a number of factors, especially the size and demographic make-up of the cohort within each faculty, and the potential to reflect the experiences of new entrants as well as those due to graduate in 2009.

Our methodological framework: *Fitting in or cooling out?*

In part the aim of this research is to explore how far vocational students have to ‘fit in’ or are ‘cooled out’ (don’t fit in and leave or fail university), or how far institutional practices change in response to the widening participation agenda. To what extent is the vocational learner being transformed to fit into the traditional university (with its sub-cultures as well as the wider culture)? To what extent are the university cultures changing to respond to the needs of vocational learners? In line with the starting-points outlined above, we were eager to explore both the interpersonal and the institutional domains, whilst also examining the interface between internal and external environments. We sought an approach that could capture vocational learners’ experiences, while retaining the potential to explore the transformational aspect of institutional practices.

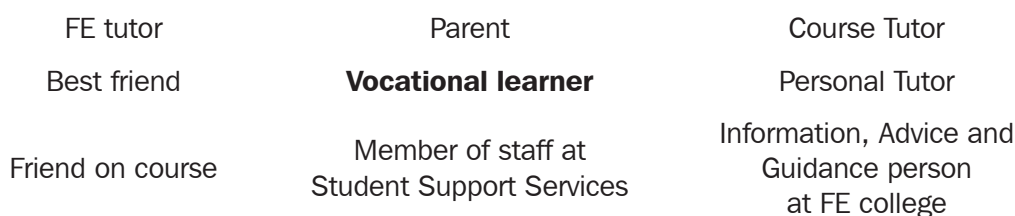
In response to this challenge, we plan to build upon earlier work by members of our team (Warren and Webb, 2007) that itself drew upon the concepts of ‘learning careers’ and ‘learning cultures’. This empirical research focused upon adults returning to formal learning and led the authors to conclude that first-person narrative interviews, even when enriched with a second reflexive interview, are insufficient to illuminate and ‘locate learners’ narratives in the fields of social practice within which they are situated’. Similarly, Ivor Goodson (2005) argues for the need for further work beyond the production of the interview narrative, putting this into context in order to consider the collective or social circumstances within which the narrative has been produced. We propose, therefore, to adopt a multi-method research design that draws upon the reflexive, pragmatic and adaptable ‘Mosaic’ approach (Clark and Moss, 2001), originally developed to capture the ‘voices’ of young, even pre-verbal, children on their experiences in childcare settings. The approach insists that listening is an active process that requires interpretation, the construction of meaning and response. It provides ‘a framework for laying out in the open ideas, perceptions and attitudes held by young children and adults in a way that promotes lively exchange and increased understanding’ (Clark and Moss, 2001: 7). In order to gain a more complete picture than might be elicited verbally or non-verbally from the child, the views of family members and key staff are also sought and examined. All those who are included are acknowledged as ‘co-constructors of meaning’ (James and Prout 1997, cited in Clark and Moss 2001). The cornerstone of the approach is the use of a range of methods to capture and understand the ‘voice’ of the child, including observations, interviews, use of cameras, tours and mapping (Clark and Moss, 2001: 12). We will seek to adapt this approach to elicit the ‘voice’ of the vocational learner, as well as eliciting the views of HE tutors and other key figures in the learner’s social world. At this point in time, we feel our mosaic could include the following data gathering methods: in-depth semi-structured interviews, camera work, documentary analysis, observations and tours.

Semi-structured interviews

An initial interview will seek to uncover the ‘networks of influence’ (Warren and Webb, 2007) of our target learners; with each learner in our sample, we will

identify key people who might help us understand social, cultural and institutional influences, and how being a learner fits into their wider social world. Key to this is recognising that the learner is in a sense a gateway to understanding their history and influences. We will look beyond the gatekeeper, i.e. our learner, to elicit the reflections of the identified key individuals in order to piece together a more complete picture, or 'mosaic', of the experiences, aspirations, motivations and decision-making processes of each learner. We anticipate that some pieces of our mosaic might be provided through semi-structured interviews with individuals who have been particularly important in supporting them through difficult times in their learning trajectory or influences such as parents, friends, peers, FE and HE staff. However, essentially the research activities will be given direction by the participating learners themselves.

Figure 1: A possible 'mosaic' illustrating the networks of influence for one vocational learner



The process of developing and carrying out the fieldwork will be informed by the theoretical frameworks outlined in Section 1. Thus, the initial interview, in addition to exploring the learner's trajectory, will be used to uncover aspects of the capabilities that the learners bring with them. The interview will also function as a vehicle for identifying not only the learner's experiences, but also aspects of the different learning cultures in college and the university department, particularly those aspects that support or inhibit progression. A return interview will share our initial analysis of the first interview in light of our conceptual framework, the institutional focus, and interviews with the learners' networks of influence. This will allow us to test out with the learners our hypotheses, to generate new understandings and to explore the learners' perspectives on whether they have acquired new capabilities and the ways in which their experience at university has had a more generalised impact on their sense of self.

Camera work

The multi-method 'Mosaic' approach combines the use of visual as well as verbal tools in order to capture the essence of the child's experience within a setting. We plan to provide disposable cameras for our learners to use, to engage them in identifying and capturing physical objects and spaces that are salient for them in their university experience. Members of our team have used disposable cameras in empirical research undertaken in early years settings to explore the experiences of very young children and we believe that the production of photo-elicitation material will add a further dimension to our methodology. It will give our work some resonance with the hospital-based work of Alan Radley and Diane Taylor (2003), who sought to uncover the impact of the physical environment

of the ward upon patients' recovery by asking them to identify and photograph up to 12 salient objects and spaces within that setting. The patients were told that they could include both positive and negative things that were significant to them and then, in the course of two interviews, they were asked to talk about their photographs and explore memories and feelings evoked by the images.

Acknowledging the intangible nature of 'culture', which is difficult to encapsulate verbally, and drawing upon both the 'Mosaic' approach and Radley and Taylor's exploratory tools in our research, we plan to concretise aspects of culture through each learner's choice of photographic subjects. As Radley and Taylor assert, 'what is picked out defines boundaries, transitions, and preferred and disliked orderings and invocations' (2003:82). In their work, patients produced photographs that did not simply depict 'objects and places', but also 'sites, sources, and channels of treatment and care', with objects and places taking on significance 'from the various practices and procedures' that they have experienced in their interactions with staff and other patients (2003:92).

In our project, we will follow the path taken by Radley and Taylor and advise our learners to avoid including people in their photographs. Not only will this steer clear of ethical concerns over consent, but also we believe that undergoing the process of selecting salient physical objects and places and then rationalising their choice for each shot, 'storying' each image to make it meaningful for the researcher as well as for themselves, will deepen the learners' critical reflections upon their learning environment and add depth to our insight into their experiences within the higher education setting. In other words, the learners' articulated explanation of the significance embodied by each site or object is likely to provide us with a glimpse into his or her university 'world' and elicit reflections upon some of the social practices that take place within that physical space; this links in with Bourdieu's concept of 'practice', invoking the idea of the ordinary and mundane as saturated with the social relations agents are embedded within. Yet another dimension would be added if we went on to invite key members of staff to carry out a similar activity with disposable cameras, selecting sites or objects that they feel would be salient features of the learners' HE experience.

Observations/tours

Observation is another essential element in the formation of the complete 'mosaic' within childcare settings; we may well find as we progress our research that formal or informal observation will add richness to our understanding of the personal experiences and cultures that are being shaped within FE or HE settings. It will preserve our critical edge, allowing us more opportunities to criticise taken-for-granted assumptions and checking the validity of different views. We are also considering the use of 'tours' (Clark and Moss, 2001:27), in which participants are involved in a 'walking interview' to talk about their experiences in a particular physical space (Langsted, 1994, Hart, 1997, cited in Clark and Moss 2001). We envisage that tours led both by learners and university staff may help to enhance our understanding of the university environment and culture.

An analytical framework ... a shared interpretation

In view of the different intellectual points of departure and academic traditions of the members of the team, our analytical framework will be multi-faceted and our approach will be inductive. We are interested in the different accounts that are produced and we want to come as a team to a shared interpretation of them – we will want to examine key features and themes that emerge. At times, members of the team will be analysing the emerging mosaic in terms of how the HE experience has impacted upon the learners' capabilities, upon their 'beings; and 'doings', while at others it will be the concepts of agency and reflexivity that will inform the process of analysis. Some of us will want to privilege 'habitus' as the unit of analysis, viewing the narrative as a special form of reflexive practice, providing us with access to how the 'everydayness' of life is intimately connected to the dynamic structuring of society; where personal stories draw on public narratives to provide coherence to private lives; and where the structure, content and performance of narratives indicate social structure. Our focus will be on identifying how the social is constituted; what social forces and processes constitute the social in particular ways.

Personal narratives will initially be examined in terms of how they are produced as a narrative connecting past, present and anticipated future. Ours will be a recursive methodology, core to which will be the dual process of deconstruction and re-construction. As outlined above, an early stage of this process will be linking the learner's narrative, produced during the initial interview, with our theoretical framework. Our tentative theorising will evolve in the course of an ongoing dialogue as the fieldwork progresses, with our theoretical 'hunches' being continually re-appraised and re-fashioned as the bigger picture, the 'mosaic', takes shape and form. Interviews with staff will allow us to reflect upon the learner's self-narration and our narrative constructions of each learner; our iterative approach will allow us to interrogate our developing theories as we share our 'mosaic' picture in the course of the second interview with the learner.

Conclusion

In summary, the development of research tools, the fieldwork and the analysis of material gathered will be informed by the theoretical frameworks detailed in the first part of this paper. Nevertheless, we are aware of the need for flexibility and reflexivity as the project progresses; the success of our methodology will be determined to some extent by our ability to adapt to unfolding revelations and circumstances. We must interrogate assumptions, whether our own or those exposed during fieldwork, to uphold the critical edge of our research and resist any tendency to sway towards framing the vocational learner in 'deficit' terms. We believe that the theoretical frameworks, layered upon our iterative, multi-method approach, reaching out to and including networks of influence, will provide an opportunity to construct a 'discursive montage'. This construction will allow us to explore and illuminate the forces at work in the process of vocational learners either 'fitting in with' or 'cooling out from' a traditional university.

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4. LEARNING CAREERS OF POOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: CULTURAL, INSTITUTIONAL AND PERSONAL DIMENSIONS

José González Monteagudo

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the learning careers of poor university students from the *Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo* (UASD), in Dominican Republic (DR). This university was established in 1538 and it was the first of the Americas. Currently the UASD has around 170,000 students, distributed between the big central campus of Santo Domingo and different regional centres. The chapter is based on a teaching and research sojourn of five weeks, undertaken in November and December 2007, financed by a bank¹. The fieldwork consisted of participant observation in different areas of the UASD central campus and semi-structured interviews undertaken with eight students and a lecturer². From observations, informal conversations, interviews and the reading of different reports, I try to offer a view on higher education focused on the social, economic, cultural and family reality of Dominican students. The paper also gives an overview of the social, historic and educational context of the Dominican Republic and discusses the questions of access, motivation, retention, difficulties regarding learning, drop out and academic success of non-traditional students, taking into account socio-cultural, institutional, familial and personal dimensions (on non-traditional students, see Merrill, 1999 and West, 1996). The paper proposes some reflections based on fieldwork data in order to foster a greater knowledge of learning careers of non-traditional students as well as to promote institutional measures to reduce drop out. The cultural and social dimensions are stressed in order to convey a complex map of learning and teaching in higher education.

¹ The stay was made possible thanks to a grant awarded by BANCAJA, through an agreement with the University of Seville. I acknowledge the financial help of BANCAJA as well the support of the Office of International Affairs of the University of Seville.

² I am in debt to the people of the DR for their support, advice and friendship. In the National Institute of Teacher Training (INAFOCAM), I wish to thank Pedro Eduardo, the executive director at the time of my sojourn, and also of Cecilia Bergés, Mercedes Rodríguez and Vicenta Pueriet for their help. At the UASD, I am very grateful for the support by the prorector Clara Benedicto and her working team, as well as the vicedoyen of the Faculty of Humanities, José Guerrero, and the lecturer Amanda Languasco. I have also benefited from the support of thirty university lecturers at the UASD, who took part in my seminar on qualitative research, amongst them Fátima Portorreal and Miguel Silva. Likewise I would like to acknowledge the work of the team at the Poveda Centre, especially Raymundo González. Thanks also to my doctoral students Miguel Ángel Moreno Hernández and Miguel Sang Ben, who accompanied me over all the stay and opened all the doors I wanted to get through. I feel myself very fortunate for meeting with and reacquainting myself with my colleagues in the DR, who have taught me many things that Europeans are progressively forgetting and marginalising.

Context of the Dominican Republic

The DR is a bicameral republic, with an area of 49,000 square kilometres and a population of nearly ten million inhabitants who are the descendents of Spanish colonists, natives of the island and African slaves. The DR occupies the eastern side of the Caribbean island *La Española*, beside Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas. The capital is Santo Domingo, with two million inhabitants, which is 20% of the total population of the country (Ferreira & Walton, 2005; Hamed, 2007; PNUD, 2007). The DR is a developing country which is broadly similar in social and economic terms to countries like Venezuela, Colombia, Thailand, China and Turkey. The DR was rated number 79 in the 2007-2008 Report of the United Nations Development Programme, with a GDP per capita of US\$8,200 (In the United Kingdom it is US\$33,000 and Spain it is US\$27,200). The average life expectancy is 72 years and the rate of literacy is 87%. Ninety percent of the population professes to be Catholic and religious beliefs are very important in everyday life. The official language is Spanish.

The Dominican economy is based on tourism, construction and the food and agriculture industry, especially the cultivation and transformation of cane sugar. The distribution of the working population by sectors is: 16% work in the agriculture sector; 21% work in industry; and 63% work in the service sector. Men are 64% and women are 36% of the workforce (four of out five women work in the service sector). Unemployment is around 18% of the population, according to official data, but it is believed to be higher. The currency is the Dominican peso. At the moment of writing this paper, the exchange rate was €1 for 50 Dominican pesos, and US\$1 was 33 Dominican pesos. Public social expenditure is very low with expending on health at 1,9%, and expending on education at 1,8% of GDP. The health situation of a significant section of the population is precarious due to a lack of a universal and good quality network of public services. Moreover the frequent hurricanes and tropical storms in the region regularly damage houses, roads, public infrastructures and crops, which has a negative effect on the standard of living of the poorest sections in society in areas such as health, transport, education and food (i.e., in May 2004 torrential rains produced a toll of 500 dead and 13.000 missing people). The Dominican government has published a strategic plan for the next few years and intends to increase educational and health budgets. Nevertheless it will be necessary to see how the international financial crisis affects the Dominican economy, very dependent on foreign investment, and the remittances from emigrants and incomes from tourism.

In the DR there is a high level of social inequality which is obvious even from strolling through the streets of Santo Domingo. The more expensive luxury contrasts with extreme poverty. The Gini index, which measures the degree of inequality (being 0 the perfect equality and 100 the perfect inequality), is 52 in the DR (in the UK it is 36 and in Spain it is 35). Three percent of the Dominican population lives on less than one \$US per day and 16% lives on less than two \$US per day. Almost half of the Dominican population (42%) lives under the poverty threshold. Another illustrative way of describing poverty and the uneven distribution of wealth consists in comparing different deciles of population. In DR the poorest 10% of the population owns 1.4% of wealth and the poorest

20% owns 4.0% of wealth. On the other hand the richest 10% of the Dominican population holds 41% of the wealth (the figures of wealth for this richest 10% are 28,5% in UK and 26.6% in Spain) and the richest 20% holds 57% of the wealth. Over the last two years questions of inequality and poverty have come into the foreground of the Dominican society because of the high cost of living, especially for basic foods and fuel. The minimum monthly salary is 3,500 Dominican pesos (€70) but this income does not even make it possible to properly feed one person. For example, a litre of milk costs between 30 and 40 Dominican pesos (around one US\$). An important sector of Dominicans have emigrated to other countries over the last decades, especially to the United States (around 700,000 Dominicans live in New York city) and Spain. According to the World Bank 28% of Dominican professionals have emigrated working abroad as taxi-drivers, waiters/waitress and unskilled workers because it affords them greater financial opportunities than in the DR, on account of limitations of the private sector and *clientelismo* in public administration (practice of giving public posts to supporters, friends and relatives with the aim of controlling civil servants) and a general lack of economic development.

Recent Dominican history has been dominated by the shadow of the Rafael Leónidas Trujillo's bloodthirsty dictatorship (1930-1961) and subsequent regimes, controlled by Joaquín Balaguer, the main ideologist and supporter of Trujillo. The period of the Trujillo's dictatorship has been brilliantly described by Mario Vargas Llosa in his novel *La fiesta del chivo* (The feast of the billy goat). Nowadays the DR is trying to overcome the problems related to authoritarianism, corruption, *clientelismo* and lack of democratic culture. Over the last few years the *Haitian problem* has been one of the main challenges that Dominican society has been coping with. Around one million Haitians are living in the DR in a very precarious condition, suffering severe exploitation at work. On some sugar cane plantations the situation is similar to a regime of semi-slavery. Many Haitians work ten hours a day for a salary of 1,5 or 2 \$US. The recent film *Haití querido* (Beloved Haiti), produced by the Italian filmmaker Claudio del Ponte, has raised awareness of this human drama, which is generally unknown in Europe.

The Challenges of Modernization of the Dominican Higher Education³

Dominican education is characterized by inequality, poor quality and limited resources in the face of a growing demand. In the specific case of the tertiary sector, UNESCO and CEPAL indicated some years ago the existence of an old-fashioned, elitist and traditional model, which is strongly resistant to change, low efficiency and lecturers who need further education and training (only 1.3% of lecturers have a PhD) (Isa and Pichardo, 2007; Silié, Cuello & Mejía, 2004)⁴.

³ I am very grateful to the educator Miguel Ángel Moreno Hernández who provided me with some reflections which have contributed to improve the content of this epigraph through a written communication of October 2007, stemmed from his very good knowledge of the Dominican education.

⁴ All the data cited or mentioned in this epigraph come from: Hamed, 2007; Isa & Pichardo, 2007; Oficina de Desarrollo Humano, 2008; PNUD, 2007; Varios, 2008.

The census of 2002 showed that the 16% of children between 6 and 13 years did not attend school. The use of time in school is a revealing indicator of the poor quality of the Dominican educational system. A survey by Gallup and EDUCA of 2005 revealed that of the four hours timetabled per day only two hours and 36 minutes were actually taken up with classes, which is the 65% of the initial planned time (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano, 2008).

In the DR there exists a limited tradition of educational research. Nevertheless in the last few years, Higher Education in Dominican Republic has changed rapidly, facing new challenges and trying to deal with new social, economic and educational demands. The recent approval of the *Plan Decenal para la Universidad, 2008-2017 (Ten-year Plan for the University, 2008-2017)* is the first important and exhaustive analysis of the current situation in higher education. This Plan is a consequence of the Presidential Forum on Educational Excellence, launched in February 2007 under the initiative of President of the republic, Leonel Fernández. Amongst the recent achievements of the Dominican university system it is necessary to stress the following: the creation of an atmosphere of discussion and reflection during a profound modernization of university institutions; the increasing of grant programmes (particularly in order to enhance the number of new university degrees amongst teachers without academic qualifications), programmes of English learning by immersion; developing connections between the university and the private economy, higher funding for research, and a programme of Youth University Card helping poor and working class students.

As two scholars state, Dominican university has a classic and traditional model, which is strongly resistant to change. [They have undertaken] very few innovative actions. The management was reduced to administrative tasks. The institutions have low efficacy and efficiency, lecturers have low level of competences, and academic courses are not updated (Isa & Pichardo, 2007). It is evident that Dominican HE is suffering a very deep crisis. The World Economic Forum has rated the Dominican university, as a result of its poor quality, at 115 out of 122 nations researched. The rate of university (including technical university institutes) registration of the population between 18 and 24 years is 25%. Within the group of the poorest 20%, only 4% are registered at the university. In the public university sector the percentage of students that finish their degree is between 20 % and 25%, after eight or ten years of university work.

As it was showed from the macro-structural perspective offered in the preceding paragraphs, inequality is a serious problem for Dominican HE. While small segments of the population invest considerable economic resources in education both in the DR and abroad, most of the population lack the resources for education and even, in many cases, lack a consciousness of its importance. The low rate of university graduation reveals persistent inequality and social exclusion. This low rate is particularly high amongst people older than 30 years old. It is necessary to take into account the limitations of primary and secondary school in terms of learning basic skills. This situation strongly affects university mature students and influence academic attainment. In this context it is important to mention the family and social profile of an important section of university students in public HE institutions. Parents have not enough qualifications to help children and the young. In many cases parents are illiterate or have only three or four years of schooling. The limitations suffered by students at home are enormous. In many cases students do not have computer access to the Internet. Also houses

frequently lack adequate spaces for study. The rate of working students and students with children is very high (women in particular are suffering several kind of inequalities within the context of a sexist society); and even students who work, sometimes do not have enough money for transport, food and childcare.

Less than 15% of children who started primary school in the state sector have access to the university or a technical institute of HE. Students who have arrive at university do not shake off these serious shortcomings. Universities try to correct these deficiencies through different initiatives, including the *Prueba de orientación y medición académica* (Test of Counselling and Academic Assessment), recently established by the Ministry of Universities and Research.

The growing educational needs of Dominican society, under pressure from civil society, globalization and the needs of the market, have led to the development of educational programmes aimed at non-traditional students, such as the University of the Third Age, andragogic programmes, and night and week-end programmes. An especially interesting case, within the sector of non-traditional students, is related to the teacher training of infant and primary schoolteachers, funded in part by international aid (as stated previously many teachers do not have academic qualification). Teacher training of HE level is aimed at people from a poor social background. High cognitive requirements related to university level have not easily been compatibles with the profile of this student population, that have normally had limited cognitive skills.

The methodological and teaching aspects of the Dominican university also display noticeable shortcomings. The tendency within HE to ask students related to reproduce and copy material is frequently criticised. Isa & Pichardo (2007) write: 'To copy has been a systematic exercise [at universities] since it was established as a system, after the Republic was born'. Despite the keen effort made by university lecturers to enhance their competency a more ambitious policy on research and teaching training of university lecturers is needed. In the DR only 1.3% of lecturers have a PhD. Besides many university lecturers have two or more jobs; which is necessary to maintain a good standard of living. Many lecturers teach directly to students for up to 40 or 42 hours per week, often in different institutions and cities which decreases the time devoted to work due to travel. It is often the case that trips are slow, uncomfortable and even dangerous. The net monthly salary earned by lecturers at the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo is around €1,000 for an average of 40 hours of teaching per week.

Non-Traditional Students of the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (UASD): Three Cases

Methodology and Field Work

The methodology employed in this research has involved the following aspects:

- a) Participant observation of everyday life (for instance, the unbelievable public transport system, the lack of safety on the streets, the conditions of housing and everyday life, the situation of infants, children and students at primary, secondary and tertiary level).
- b) Participant observation of university life in the central campus of the UASD (in rooms, the central library, the refectory, at official events, during

the election of university authorities, in administrative offices, in lecturers' and managers' offices, and in gardens and public spaces).

- c) Documentary analysis of daily newspapers, as an instrument to understand society, culture, conflicts and major national debates. Also I devoted some time to listening to radio and TV.
- d) The main technique has been the semi-structured interview. Twelve students were selected, but only eight were interviewed. I also interviewed one lecturer. Interviews, with an average length of 40 minutes, have been transcribed and analysed⁵.

Written information given to students indicated that the research was concerned with the situation of poor and non-traditional students at the university and to search for some measures to enlarge the number of these type of students entering university as well as to improve their academic success. Students filled a short written questionnaire aimed at identifying their social and academic profile. Later students were selected who fulfilled some of the criteria considered important in the research. Students provided personal and family details, their educational career and their working and social situation. Students interviewed had some of these traits: a) they came from poor and working sectors; b) they combined work and university studies; c) they had dependents; d) in the case of women, they had suffered from inequality. The interviews documented the socio-economic, cultural and family reasons for drop out and the delays in completing a course of study, as well as the difficulties in relation to teaching and learning, personal experiences on mentors, etc. The changing identity of young and adults learners, in a society combining demands of tradition and innovation, dealing with new challenges unknown some years ago (ITC, role of women, crisis of traditional family, multicultural contexts, globalized economy), was also explored.

Selection of the Three Case Studies

The three cases presented here (Olivia, Teresa and Antonio; all the names have been changed) have been selected from the eight students interviewed during the fieldwork. To select the three cases I have taken into account the following criteria: (a) they belong to different degree courses (History, Industrial Psychology and Education); (b) care was taken to ensure a representative balance between women (two) and men (one); (c) they are students who have provided appropriate and sufficient information regarding personal, professional and educational areas, (d) to represent young (two) and mature (one) students. The three interviews were undertaken between 15th November and 5th December 2007. In the three cases I have focused my attention on the importance of social, economic, cultural, family, ideological and religious aspects of the learning careers of non-traditional students. The texts in italics reproduce textual quotations from the oral interviews. The three cases are the following:

- CASE 1: OLIVIA (42 years old, de facto relationship, 3 children, she works as a teacher without academic qualifications, student of a degree in Education from 1999, seventh semester). The interview was undertaken

⁵ To transcribe the interviews I have had the excellent help of my daughter Julia González Calderón, student of the degree of Hispanic Philology. Carlos Gómez Morales have also contributed to the work on transcriptions.

on the evening of a rainy Sunday, 18th December 2007, at the home of a colleague, who is Olivia's brother-in-law. Olivia has started her degree in 1999, but pulled out of her studies several times as a result of working and personal difficulties⁶. The more relevant information given by Olivia was provided with before putting on the recorder, in an informal conversation, focused on her family, educational and professional biographical history, so in this case there are not word-for-word quotations.

- CASE 2: TERESA (22 years old, single, no children, student of Industrial Psychology, eighth semester). The interview was undertaken on Tuesday, 20th of November 2007, in the *campo de pelota* (baseball field) of the UASD. Teresa represents the profile of young women combining studies and work, with strong family support and a normal educational itinerary characterized by continuity and stability.
- CASE 3: ANTONIO (21 years old, single, he works in the family *colmado* -typical Dominican grocer's shop, normally in the corner of the streets-, student of History, third semester). The interview was undertaken on Wednesday 28th of November 2007, in the Institute of Anthropology of the UASD. Antonio represents the profile of young male students who are working in a modest family business and are highly motivated students.

Case 1 Profile: Olivia (Housewife with Two Children, Teacher with no Qualifications, University Student)

Olivia was born in February 1965. Thus, she was 42 years of age at the time of the interview. During the civil war of April 1965, her mother went into hiding, sheltering Olivia in a cave for a period of time until the danger was over. Olivia is the middle child of a total of five siblings. She was married in 1984 and left her studies when she was completing her first year of the High School Certificate (*Bachillerato*). She had a daughter in 1985 (who is currently 22 years of age) and separated from her husband a little after the birth of this child. She has now been living in a *de facto* relationship for 19 years with her current partner with whom she has two children: a daughter born in 1989 (18 years of age) and a son born in 1990 (17 years of age) who has meningitis and attends a work centre between 8am and 4pm. Olivia receives 1,400 pesos (28€) monthly for her son's work in which he carries out packaging tasks that help him exercise his manual dexterity. From a very early age, Olivia felt the desire to teach, and ever since she was small, she always told her mother that she wanted to

⁶ Olivia is a good example of the large group of teachers working without academic qualification and studying with a grant at state universities. Most of this group is composed of women who are older than 25 or 30 years, normally with children. Even though Olivia lives with her partner, most of these women mature students with children are divorced or are living alone. To be alone represents an important additional difficulty to satisfy the basic needs of the family. Over the last few years the Dominican government, through the INAFOCAM (*Instituto Nacional de Formación y Capacitación Magisterial* - National Institute for Teacher Training), have conducted an important programme of grants and financial aid to promote the graduation of more than 20.000 teachers who had been working without an adequate degree. Anyway the increasing of prices of all kinds of products is increasing the difficulty for Dominican students to following normally university teaching or even to combining studies and work.

become a teacher. She has completed many vocational courses training herself as an archivist, secretary, masseuse and bank teller over the 15 years from when she was married in 1984 until her enrolment at university in 1999.

Olivia encouraged her partner to enrol at the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (UASD). He did so and completed one semester of a Physical Education degree passing all of the six courses he enrolled on, but he had to abandon his studies due to their incompatibility with his fulltime job. At the moment, after finishing a course in refrigeration, he helps a family member in installing and repairing air conditioners. He works 10 hours a day, between 7am and 5pm, in Santo Domingo and other cities of the Dominican Republic.

Olivia has had different occupations. She was a stylist in a unisex beauty salon for 6 years, and for a year and a half, she worked as a secretary for a workshop. She has long experience as a teacher in different environments. In the academic year 1997/1998 she earned 1,300 pesos (26€) net a month. Before her current job, she worked between the hours of 7.30am and 4.30pm in a day-care centre with 12 children. At the moment, she works from 7.30am to 12pm in a kindergarten, also with 12 children aged between 4 and 5. She goes to work on foot which takes her about 10 minutes. Her monthly net salary is 2,300 pesos (46€). She complements this job by substituting teachers in the afternoon sessions between 12pm and 5.30pm. For example, last week she worked three afternoons for which she was paid 100 pesos (2€) each session. She worked with primary school pupils (aged between 9 and 10 years). There were 48 pupils in the class. Olivia says they were very disobedient and that she prefers to work in preschool education as primary school pupils are more difficult to handle.

This semester in university, she is undertaking two courses (Child Development and Reading & Writing) but she would also like to do a third one (Statistics). She has eight courses to go to finish her undergraduate degree. She pays six pesos (0.1€) for each unit of credit. At the moment, she only attends class at the UASD on Fridays from 4pm to 10pm. In the past, when she was undertaking more courses, she had classes three times a week (Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays). On Fridays, she takes 100 pesos with her (which she earns for an afternoon substitution in the kindergarten) for her expenses (transport to and from university, and to buy a juice in between classes). Sometimes she also has to purchase course booklets so that she can do her homework.

Olivia's typical week consists of working each morning and some afternoons (depending on whether a substitution becomes available) in the kindergarten. She gets up very early and goes to bed at around 8pm. She doesn't like watching television. When she works in the afternoon, she hardly has any free time, although she usually dedicates one or two hours to housework and to cooking dinner, normally between 6pm and 8pm. Weekends she dedicates to housework, such as washing the clothes, ironing, cleaning, etc. For Olivia, lack of time or having to juggle her studies with work and family is not the major difficulty she faces in her university studies. Instead, it is the sense of instability and crime. When she returns to her neighbourhood on Friday evenings after her classes at the university, there is a substantial risk that she might be mugged, robbed or attacked. About three months ago, a few young people were killed there. Occasionally, one can hear gun fire. My life is worth more than that, says Olivia, if I get killed, I won't be able to continue my studies.

Case 2 Profile: Teresa (University Student, Part-time Secretary at the UASD, an Adventist)

Teresa is 22 years of age; she is single, has four siblings and is on her last semester of a Psychology degree (majoring in Industrial Psychology) with only four courses to go to finish her degree. She works as a secretary in the Department of Pedagogy of the UASD where she has been for two years and where her hours are Monday to Friday between 11am and 3pm (20 hours per week). For this work she receives a monthly scholarship payment of 3,863.50 pesos (77€). Teresa has been following the normal study plan progressing according to the norm for her age group. Of her previous work experiences, it should be pointed out that she worked in a beauty salon when she was 15. In addition, at 17 she worked for a year as an assistant in a kindergarten with her weekly hours being 7.45am to 1.10pm. After this and before joining the Department of Pedagogy at the UASD as a secretary, she was an assistant scholar in the same Department for which she received a meal grant. In school she was praised for academic excellence (in other words, she made it on to the Honour Roll). According to one of her teachers, she is a good, hard-working student. In the interview, she seems kind, cheerful and observant. Her father works in a supermarket, price labelling merchandise. Her mother has a university degree in Early Childhood Education and has greatly motivated Teresa to continue studying.

Teresa's typical week revolves around three things: her part-time job at the Department of Pedagogy of the UASD, the afternoon industrial psychology classes and her religious (Adventist) weekend activities. She also participates in housework, as she lives with her father for whom she, for example, prepares breakfast every morning. She has little time to study, although she is able to take advantage of the breaks between classes in the afternoons, as well as some quiet moments at work in the mornings. During her years at university, she has built up a small library of seven or eight books on industrial psychology. She has a computer at home but no internet connection.

Teresa attaches a fundamental importance in her life to religion. She, as the rest of her family, is an Adventist and she tries to lead her life according to some of the strict moral principles of this Protestant confession, which emerged in the 19th century in the United States and which proclaims the second coming of Jesus. Usually Teresa takes a prepared lunch to university, given that Adventists do not eat meat. Each morning after getting up, she reads the devotional and the Bible. Religion plays an important part in the way she conceives life:

“In my education, the church... has helped me quite a lot due to the fact that when one has knowledge of a religion, of a doctrine... one does not perceive life... as others do... One could say that [one] lives in a world apart, but the fact that one lives in a world apart does not mean that one does not speak to everyone else. Still, one does not get involved in the activities that the others do, for example, going to a disco, dancing. We... take part in activities within the limits of our religion..., we organise recreational activities like camps, spiritual retreats and anything that has to do with the environment in which we're involved.”

When I asked her which is more important to her - her faith or a profession - Teresa stops to think and hesitates, but seems to incline towards her faith as a central element: *Which is more important? Well, I know that God, first of all, is essential, but for me... Well, it would be difficult for me to choose. I don't know which would come first. But God before anything else.* Teresa's weekends, which begin on Friday afternoons, have a highly religious content. Firstly, she is the head of ushers (persons who attends to visits and who are also in charge of directing members and visitors from the church entrance to their seating inside) in her church. Often after her classes at university, Teresa attends the church's Youth Society, except if she is very tired. On Saturdays, she arrives at the church before 9am to prepare the programme for the class which she gives to the children between 9am and 10.30am. Afterwards, she attends the religious service between 10.30am and 12pm. Saturday afternoons she dedicates to mission work or to spending time with the children of the church, for example, rehearsing something. Teresa tends to organise and occupy her time throughout the week. On Sundays, between 10am and 2pm, she undertakes a course in Recruitment and Selection.

Teresa complains about the lack of sensitivity and methodology of some of her teachers:

"At times, certain teachers, due to their way... of giving classes, did not guide us enough... and they did not assess us in a proper manner, keeping in mind the effort we put in... the results I got were not what I was really expecting due to... the strategies they used and their methodology, which to my understanding was not very good... So, in light of pedagogy, there are teachers who do not opt for the correct methods in delivering their subject, given that they do not have, I would say, the entire contents of the programme for their subject organised, they are not clear on this."

As one of the things that could be improved on at the university, Teresa points out the issue of noise:

"I think that something should be done about the noise, it's very noisy, there is no concentration... In the classrooms. For example, sometimes people from other classes make too much noise in the corridors and they don't let the people who are in the middle of a class to concentrate. She also thinks that the university is overcrowded: My view is that there should be more classrooms. I understand that the university is overcrowded, because there are times when we don't even have chairs to sit on and we have go looking for some in other classrooms. Occasionally, it also happens that a classroom is too small for the number of students in a given course. Just take a look at the situation we have here: we are given classes here in front of the baseball field because the classroom that was allocated to us is a basement..."

Teresa positively values the support services offered to students by the UASD and highlights the efficiency of the dining room, the library, the university store and a bank branch. Teresa thinks that the main problems that students have relate to their work and the inadequate class timetables at university:

"The problem for most of the students is that it is necessary for them to work... so it is sometimes impossible for them to come to

university, [and they can't] take many subjects. For this reason, there are many that stay, you could say, for a long time here in university. I have classmates that have already been here for six years, some have gotten married, some are working, and the timetable offered here does not suit them, given that they finish work, for example, at five o'clock and their course is only offered once, at four or three o'clock."

With regards to her class mates, Teresa emphasises the feminisation of the student base and the higher motivation that women have towards continuing their studies:

"In my field... there are more ladies... I find that us women, we are more motivated... to study, because I can see that many have their home to look after, they have their family [but they don't leave their studies]... [In contrast, guys] when they play football, they fall behind and leave their studies; if they find a good job, they don't continue university."

Looking to the future, Teresa says that within 15 years she sees herself married, with a baby and working in her field. And she also sees herself persisting in her religious faith.

Case 3 Profile: Antonio (University Student, Works in the Family Grocery Store, A Devoted Believer)

Antonio is in his third semester of a History degree and has a true vocation for history, as we will see in the following. He is unmarried (although has been with his girlfriend for a few years) and lives with his mother and sisters. As he went to a public high school, he pays seven pesos for each university unit of credit. A year ago, he missed one semester due to an error in the spelling of his surname. Antonio's parents studied up to the third year of the High School Certificate. His father is self employed, although previously he worked in the commercial sector. His mother runs two businesses at home: a grocery store and a beauty salon. He has three sisters. Two of them are studying Medicine and Economics at university. The youngest one is in high school, although she has missed three years of it due to a viral hepatitis.

Antonio was born in 1986. During elementary school, he missed two school years due to the after effects of an appendicitis. At 17, he left baseball as a result of a fractured knee and saw his promising sports career fall to pieces. He dislocated his kneecap which was the most painful experience of his life. From an early age, he has lived the Christian faith. His family guided him to the faith and integrated him in the church (for example, as the director of the church theatre group).

Antonio says he felt attracted to history from very young: *Since I was small, history appealed to me. A secondary school history teacher encouraged me to study and analyse it.* Now, as he is doing his degree in History at the university, he is delighted to have been assigned this identity by his neighbours:

"When I come home from university, I often run into my neighbours who play domino round the corner from my house, because... the Dominicans love to do is in the street, at their leisure. And every time they see me coming, they call out: 'Historian!'"

For Antonio, it is comforting to hear this remark from time to time. He is a serious student who demonstrates great maturity and independence in his opinions and comments. He shows immense interest in history as well as towards building up his personal library which at the moment consists of about 60 books. He has a very specific objective set in regards to his books: to read one a month. Antonio also likes writing. In recent times, he has developed this interest applying it to his religious activities. He usually writes poems, Christian songs and theatre plays to be performed by the theatre group he directs at his church.

The family grocery store and the beauty salon are run by Antonio's mother with the help of the rest of the family. Antonio tends to be in charge of the grocery store when his mother works at the beauty salon, but he tries to use any free time he can find to make progress on his university work. Some days he also helps cooking for the family:

"If the food is ready, well, I eat it. If not, I ask what we are going to cook, and I prepare it, too... because they taught me to cook since I was eight years old. It was because of an idiosyncrasy. I was left alone with my father for a few weeks and my dad always cooked the same... he made fried salami. Fried eggs, fried salami, fried eggs... And I said: 'No, we'll have to make rice, at least...'"

When he describes himself as a student, Antonio points out his motivation to perform well and to improve his assessed resultst:

"If I didn't get a good mark in an exam, I tried to do better in the next one, I mean, to not get stuck. I wasn't easily satisfied when it came to exams. If the teachers told me: "No, you got an 85", I explained to them why and [I asked them] to tell me in which point I had failed so that I could try to [improve]."

In the field of history, Antonio mentions two great mentors. One of them is an important figure of the unfortunate 20th century history of the Dominican Republic: Colonel Francisco Alberto Caamaño, a hero of the civil war of 1965. The other is a historian, whom I have had the opportunity to meet during my field work in the Dominican Republic; we are talking about Professor Roberto Cassá, President of the Dominican Academy of History and the Director-General of National General Archives of the Dominican Republic:

"I look up to two figures, one is historical..., Francisco Alberto Caamaño, and the other is Professor Roberto Cassá, whose [way] of writing and lecturing I love - and I have already told this to many of my classmates. I haven't had the chance to be his student yet, but I know him and I've seen him when I've been to the Academy of History. As a history student, I have to go there sometimes to attend conferences and I've seen him in action and he causes me..., I mean, he impresses me."

A typical week during the university semester for Antonio, who normally sleeps six hours a day, means getting up very early and dedicating the morning to the family grocery store as well as his studies. Afterwards, he goes to university to attend classes starting at 2pm from Monday to Thursday. It takes him an hour

and a half to get to university due to the midday traffic jams but the return home is half an hour, given that he comes back at night when there is less traffic.

“On Mondays, I am already up at 5am..., I am used to it, and since I was small my mother always told me that I got up too early... I got accustomed [to getting up early] when I started university, because I had to make the most of my time... I start at 5am; I get up, I pray... At 7.30am we open the doors [of the store], because we sell beans and chicken meat. So, often I am in the grocery store between 7.30am and 10am... I usually study between 10am and 12pm. And after that I go to university, because I have classes at 2pm, [after which] I have a three hour break, however, it would be difficult for me to go back home, so I stay here in the university, in the library, finishing whatever homework I have..., the next class is at 8pm..., I stay on and get on with work, for example, if I have a presentation to do, I prepare that.”

On Saturdays he has classes from 10am until 1pm, but he regularly stays back until 4pm, because he takes part in the History Students' Association. Friday is his day off:

“On Fridays.... I have a day off which I spend clearing my head and doing whatever I feel like, and I still play sports; table tennis and baseball, not so hard but I still do it... I divide Fridays into three segments: In the morning I'm at home, in the afternoon I go and play baseball or table tennis, and at night I sometimes have a meeting at the theatre, we get together around 11pm, and then I go on to organise the material for Saturday's classes. Antonio's Sundays have a religious content: Sundays, between 7am and 12pm, I dedicate to... God. In other words, the morning is reserved to God and the church.”

It is important for Antonio to know how to organise his time and his work:

“I work with a diary. I mean, since I was small, I was taught to draw up my own timetable..., this I learnt from my mother, and at school, a history teacher..., who was very strict,... taught this to me... She used to say that to be able to get somewhere in life, one needs to organise oneself first... and draw up a plan. Or, it's like being an engineer laying out on the table a plan [to] build a house..., so that we can see at which point we will fail. And even if we fail at that point and we stop there, well, we'll leave it sitting there for a while, but when we've gathered strength again, we'll carry on with the project.”

The concept of planning and control is also evident in the way Antonio looks at money and in the spending and savings budget that he tends to follow in an attempt to save money in a methodical manner:

“I always try not to spend much, not because of the situation my family is in, but because of my studies. Sometimes you come to university and if you don't have a certain book, you'll have to take photocopies... I come to university with 100 pesos. I spend approximately 15 pesos to come here, in transport, and 15 to go back home, that's 30..., I almost always buy a juice and a pie, which cost 25 pesos. If I need to take copies, well, I take copies and the rest [I save]... I have a bankbook and every month I deposit [my savings] in the bank.”

During the interview, Antonio remembers the positive influence his father has had on encouraging him into a reading habit. Antonio also mentions how he has tried to play a similar role in relation to his friends from the neighbourhood in inspiring them to read more. The following extract highlights also the capacity that the working class has in creating cultural strategies around the scarce resources available, and in compensating for the lack of social and basic educational services, in this case, libraries:

“In my house, my father has been the one with a habit of reading, because he was a librarian, he had a library... It was a sort of a family library, which was later converted into a private one where anyone who needed a book could go, deposit, I think, four cents, and they lent them the book. As I saw him reading, I, too, became interested and I asked him what he got out of it and he told me. But what really made reading a part of my life was a book I was given in eighth grade by my history teacher and that book was the Contemporary History of the Dominican Republic (*Historia Contemporánea de la República Dominicana*). I read this book, I analysed it, and from then on I've been reading. Later, when I went to high school, my teacher there also encouraged me. Every time I passed my exams, she gave me a book... From then on, little by little, I kept acquiring books that I found interesting and I placed them in a sort of a personal library of my own. I have around 60 books already. But when I had about 30 books, there were some that I hadn't even read yet. Before I went to university, I set out to read a book a month, no matter how thick it was. I had to finish it in 30 days. And my friends said to me: 'You'll go crazy reading!', but I also inspired many of them to read, because they saw me reading and reading, and they went: 'Hey, give me that book to read, then', and... they started getting into the habit which they still conserve.”

Even though he has had a problem with a Philosophy teacher, Antonio conveys a very positive general opinion on his teachers: A large majority of the teachers I have had until now are excellent, they are highly qualified... I think that there are a lot of qualified teachers in this University. Planning for the future, Antonio sees himself as a history teacher with the army. The next extract shows the importance he gives to national identity:

“[In the future, I see myself] as a graduate, working in a social environment... Because I've always said this: I don't care about money... I've always said that money doesn't buy happiness, we can make ourselves happy, but not by having money... When I finish my degree, I want to get into the Military Academy as a qualified professional, and my goal is to give history classes to the cadets who are in training to become professional soldiers... Already in high school I decided... “Well, I'm going to be a historian, but I would like to teach cadets”, because there were army cadets that... didn't know the history of the Armed Forces and also weren't well aware of the history of our public holidays.”

Antonio admits the great importance he attaches to his religion in an extract where he speaks of Divine Providence:

“I depend to a large degree on my Christian values, and at times, before doing anything, I first pass my thoughts by God, or to put it in another way; God, if You want this to happen, Thy will be done, and even if You do not want it to happen, Thy will be done, because You bring us into this world and we are here for a purpose, and You bring us here so that we can see how wonderful it is... I live aware of God’s presence in my life and of all the wonders He has done to me. Because if He had wished so, He would have taken me when I was eight years old, when I was still innocent. But He left me on this earth, and it is for a purpose that will end on the day I die.”

Conclusions and Implications

In a globalized, multicultural and connected world, and more attention from Europe it is important to look at contexts outside of the Western culture. This chapter aims to enhance knowledge and comparative work on other educational contexts, as well as improve cooperation among researchers and educators from diverse countries, languages and cultures. This chapter is situated in this context. The information given by Olivia, Teresa and Antonio is relevant in order to understand the profile of learning careers of non-traditional students in the Dominican HE⁷. Although the capability of oral expression, the relevance of the information and the details provided with have been very different, I have found in the three cases a very rich content in the biographical, family, economic, social and educational dimensions which influence, mould and impede the learning careers, identities and final achievements within the context of university studies. Family contexts and educational itineraries of the three cases show clearly the precariousness of educational, social and health services in DR. These services have been improving over the last few years, but they are incapable of answering to the growing increasing of demands and expectations created by modernization, social change, the rise of the urban population and growth of intake in the different educational levels, including HE. As I stressed above, the low quality of primary and secondary school in the state sector affects the instrumental and cognitive readiness of university students, particularly in those cases in which family situation and support are very precarious. The three cases presented here show the importance of family (incomes and economic status, housing, educational and cultural opportunities, cultural quality of the home, IT facilities) to promote or not university retention and success. Lack of family support and the need of combining education and work lead to learning careers that are more likely to be interrupted and prolonged. The high rate of drop-out demands urgent measures to

⁷ This paper is my first text on non-traditional students. In this context I wish to acknowledge the Dr Barbara Merrill’s invitation (University of Warwick) to take part in the European project RANLHE (Access and Retention in Higher Education: Experiences of Non-traditional Learners, 2008-2010, financed by the Lifelong Learning Programme, European Union; website: www.ranlhe.dsw.edu.pl). This project is at the origin of my fieldwork in the Dominican Republic.

act on policy, institutional and educational dimensions from a holistic perspective. It is needed more emphasis on student support in relation to transportation, food, school materials and grants for poor students. To make possible these educational policies, it is necessary a political management focused on the struggle against inequality as well as tax policies more progressive and fairer.

Olivia, Teresa and Antonio demonstrate the significance of personal initiative and eagerness to overcome this in order to develop successful learning careers. The three students are people who are very active and busy, who know how to manage time and to make the most regarding different activities, combining demands coming from family, university and work, integrating them into personal life. A strong will to learn and having free time make possible the engagement in non-compulsory educational and training activities, as eloquently Teresa's and Antonio's itineraries show. Also there was a marked interest in altruistic and volunteer activities, influenced by a religious approach to life and education.

For the near future, the ambitious challenges specified in the *Plan Decenal de Educación Superior* will characterize the deep modernization required by the Dominican higher education system, within the context of a difficult and complex world, where education continue to be one of the best tools to promote both personal growth and useful knowledge for working and social life.

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5. THE JOURNEY OF NON-TRADITIONAL ADULT STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF AVEIRO

Ana Vitória Baptista, Lucília Santos,
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«Every journey is unique. No two adults are exactly alike.
(...) Amid the variability, there are some typical
itineraries, some commonly shared experiences,
and some shared lessons or tasks».
(Bee & Bjorklund, 2004, p.1)

«More adults, including non-traditional adults, are entering
higher education across Europe as part of this change process.
It is, therefore, essential that higher education institutions take
into account the learning needs and biographies of adult students».
(Johnston & Merrill, 2004, p.1)

Introduction: Our destination

Since the agreement of the Bologna Declaration in 1999, we are seeing major changes in the structures of higher education (HE) and a growing awareness about the new demands and requests that are being asked of HE institutions. When reflecting about the Bologna Reports, we are confronted increasingly with ideas for enhancing lifelong learning, improving opportunities for all citizens, opening HE to new and different publics and supporting them with flexible learning paths. The concept of lifelong learning and ideals have acquired a new breath that has spread a dialogue within the HE agenda.

Recently, in Portugal, a Law-Decree (n. 64/2006) was approved that legislates the entrance of adults over 23 years old (called M23) with certain attributes to HE institutions. These are considered to be *mature students* or *non-traditional adult students*, due to their particular characteristics. This has led to a diversity of publics in HE and this is becoming much more apparent as they are entering HEIs in a growing number year after year.

Due to this reality and to the lack of Portuguese investigation into adult learners in an HE context, a research project was started at the UA in October 2007. The study has analysed the characteristics of these adult learners: socio-demographic, academic, professional, and motivational. We intended to focus our research on the first group that entered HE after the promulgation of that Law-Decree, so that we could better know and understand the demands asked of HEIs from the beginning and design a first profile of these mature students that attended the UA. Therefore, we started to collect data from students' personal files and through semi-directed interviews. These are the instruments which led to our findings which we present in this study.

Consequently, authors' main purpose is to describe a part of the journey of these non-traditional adult students during the academic year 2006-2007: (1) their access to UA and all the steps that led to this path; and (2) their characteristics, essential to understanding, reflecting and discussing certain aspects related to their identity as learners, such as (2.1) their experiences in several contexts mainly in professional and academic ones, (2.2) their motivations towards learning in a HE context, (2.3) their expectations towards HE and learning, (2.4) the support they have to continue their learning path at an HEI. We will frame this research within the theoretical background previously described.

Starting the journey: Remembering the Bologna Process and Lifelong Learning objectives

The Bologna Process is extremely important, as far as the HE agenda is concerned, although we understand that it goes beyond that goal. Nevertheless, it is the educational perspective that we desire to emphasise. When we carefully analyse several official documents, especially the Reports of the Ministerial Reunions which followed the signing up of the Bologna Declaration in 1999, we find incredibly relevant the progressive importance given to the construction of a European Area of Lifelong Learning. This fact perfectly dialogues with the establishment of the European Higher Education Area, so that the Europe of Knowledge is achieved.

Therefore, when we are reviewing those European Reports, we will verify that the Prague Communiqué (2001) highlights that: "Lifelong learning is an essential element of the European Higher Education Area. In the future Europe, built upon a knowledge-based society and economy, lifelong learning strategies are necessary to face the challenges of competitiveness and the use of new technologies and to improve social cohesion, equal opportunities and the quality of life." (p.2). Additionally, we will confirm a more progressive and bigger importance to the commitment of "making quality higher education equally accessible to all" (Bergen Communiqué, 2005, p.4). To achieve this, the London Communiqué (2007) refers the necessity of providing more flexible learning paths through the educational system. Consequently, we can observe that the HE and Lifelong Learning agendas are focused on the achieving of this greater objective which we have already mentioned: the construction of a strong, dynamic and competitive Europe of Knowledge.

Accordingly to Schuetze (2006) and Jakobi & Rusconi (2008), among other researchers, we argue that the concept of lifelong learning is seen as an "umbrella concept", due to several dimensions we can highlight in its definition. When analysing various documents written across different decades, we can verify the multifaceted definition and approach. As a consequence, we point out that the international debate that puts this concept at the centre of discussions and attempts of conceptual definitions promotes on the one hand the enrichment of perspectives and, on the other, contributes to widen its perspective and definition. As a result, we understand the reason why Schuetze and Casey (2006) refer to this concept as a "chameleon" (p.282).

Nevertheless, this concept and ideology are at the order of the day, and all the changes and uncertainties, which we are witnessing in all the spheres of our lives, are making these discussions and renewal of a concept as something pertinent and essential. It underlines that today's demands and life require that all of us, as citizens of the world, and even institutions (especially, those related to educational systems) need to be permanently learning, re-learning, and un-learning (Zabalza, 2002). And this may happen in a great variety of contexts, in different spaces and times, more or less consciously, more or less predisposed to the learning adventure and path.

Therefore, we can not finish without emphasising the idea that we consider lifelong learning as a holistic concept with the final purpose of developing the "individual human potential" (Longworth & Davies, 1998, p.22). It happens lifelong and life-wide and this significance acquires a stronger sense when we are confronted with the new and emergent realities of HEIs, in particular, the constant dynamics of the changing world, and all the constructions and reconstructions that we, as individuals, have to face.

In order to continue our journey, it is also essential to highlight what we can find in a European Commission Report (2002): "Lifelong learning is an overarching strategy of European co-operation in education and training policies and for the individual. The lifelong learning approach is an essential policy strategy for the development of citizenship, social cohesion, employment and for individual fulfilment." (p.4). Although economic perspectives are transmitted by many educational departments, strategies and policies, nowadays the reality seems to be much more complex and challenging. So, it is almost impossible dissociate to (lifelong) learning from social, economical, political, educational, personal purposes and perspectives.

Sightseeing: Visiting the University of Aveiro

For a non-traditional adult student to enter an HE institution in Portugal, s/he has to fulfil certain attributes that are described in a Law-Decree (n. 64/2006). This Decree legislates the entrance of adults over 23 years old, with particular characteristics, and this contingent of new students is addressed as M23, at the UA. To apply for a place in this contingent, the adult student has to undergo a set of examinations that are meant to evaluate their capacity to attend an HE course. These examinations consist of three steps:

- The appreciation of the academic, professional and individual *Curriculum Vitae* (CV) of the candidate;
- A written theoretical or practical examination regarding knowledge and competences considered fundamental to enter and progress in the degree in which the candidate intends to ingress;
- The evaluation of the candidate's motivations, through an interview.

In order to minimise the impact of this new contingent on the regular structure of the administrative office of the University, and, more important, anticipating difficulties the candidates might have, due to their prospective profile, in dealing with the administrative issues, a Unique Counter (UC) was implemented

on an organic unit of the University, where all the procedures related to the candidature procedures took place. Also there is a M23 page at the University site addressed to this particular group, where it is available and updated with relevant information to them.

At this point, the application forms are submitted on-line, either by the candidate on their own, or at the UC, with personalised help, and are elaborated in such a way that will allow the collection of data to statistically characterise the applicants. Then the examinations are publicised on the site and at the UC, which coordinates the logistics associated, directing the candidates to the rooms. The juries of the interviews are formed, and include the course Director as well as the M23 Coordinator, and, at least, a third member. The candidates who reach the interview stage complete the evaluation process with a talk with three Professors who know their complete CV and the results of the examinations. They establish a conversation clarifying doubts of the candidate and/or their own, explaining, for instance, the Bologna principles, the main objectives of the course, or suggesting another orientation on the course choice.

The final mark with which they apply for a course at the UA will take into account the following aspects and weights: 60%: exam; 20%: motivations; 20%: academic, professional and personal curriculum. It will be possible, very shortly, to credit some formations the candidates present in their CV, as there is legislation on that purpose. If the certification or accreditation proves to be wider than the M23 range, they will be oriented to the University office that deals with the RVCC processes (recognition, validation and certification of competences). After passing the examinations, applying to the M23 contingent and entering the University, these students may still come to the UC for further support.

A first stop: An overview of our investigation at the University of Aveiro

It is a fact: HEIs are facing a new reality. Not only is the context and the background of their *practice* changing, but also (and especially) the *new publics* that are now (re)entering, due to a great set of problematic and complex factors with which our new reality is *struggling*. Therefore, higher education is dealing with multiple students' profiles. Also, what could be understood as *non-traditional* is increasing: different characteristics, motives, expectations, and demands. Additionally, the growing number of students with so diversified features requires that HEIs know who their students are, so that they can plan coherent and systematic strategies with which they can manage part of the uncertainty and the more challenging and urgent requests.

Bearing in mind this major concern, we designed a research project which focused on the first group of non-traditional adult students (M23) that entered the UA during the academic year of 2006-2007. Additionally, this was the first group of students that entered HE after the promulgation of the above mentioned Law-Decree. This research was mainly developed during the academic year 2007-2008. However, we are still finishing the analysis of all the data collected and there is some information that is still arriving. Therefore, these are recent results.

Our main and more general goal was to proceed to a description of this target-population, concerning demographic, academic, professional, and motivational characteristics. So that we could accomplish this intent, we had to analyse their personal files very carefully, in order to contextualise and understand their paths and options. We had access to some important documents: the questionnaire the adult candidates had to complete at the first phase when they were applying for a HE course at the UA and the respective letter of motivation –a compulsory annex. We analysed the files of the 85 adult students who enrolled in the academic year 2006-2007 and from these two documents we collected demographic, professional, academic and motivational data.

Also, while we were analysing the questionnaires and the letters of motivation, an e-mail was sent to all the students of this group to ask their participation in this research. Nevertheless, only 9 (of 85 students) were available for an interview directed by us, in order to gather more data, which we considered important to enrich their characterisation, and deepen certain aspects. This semi-structured interview directed to the available adult students had several purposes. Among the dimensions we designed, we included questions which related to the expectations they had towards the University, more particularly the UA, towards the course to which they have entered, and also related to the support they felt they had.

The data we collected were qualitatively and quantitatively analysed, so that we could achieve some conclusions to answer our greater objective and also to stimulate the discussion. Additionally, we followed a descriptive perspective in our analysis. However, it is also relevant to stress that this descriptive journey situates itself in a more external level in relation to a more profound and inner level of *intimacy* which we have not completed concerning the adult student. We believe that was important, firstly, to collect this kind of data, in order to have some basis to begin, afterwards, another approach about the *how* and *why* some things occur.

The main harbour of our journey: Our main results concerning the journey of the adult students

Demographic journey

The sample of this research is constituted by 85 non-traditional adult students, enrolled at the UA for the first time in the academic year 2006-2007. As far as demographic aspects are concerned, we must underline that 55,3% are male and 44,7% are female students. Their ages vary between 24 and 60 years old (average=33,95; standard deviation=8,37). The majority have a Portuguese nationality, as we could predict; and also the majority live near the University. This last point emphasises that the localisation of the University influences adult students' choice, in order to be closer to home and to work. This also reflects the several commitments they have to balance. Focusing on their family constitution and responsibilities, 45,1% are married or de facto unions, 17,1% are divorced and 37,8% are single. Many of those who are married and divorced have children. This fact also increases their responsibility at home and the family roles they have to play. These aspects need to be highlighted so that we can understand some of the results which we find in their academic results.

Professional journey

Focusing our attention on the professional aspects, we observe that the great majority (85%) are employed. This fact is coherent with Portuguese and international literature that shows us that they are usually financial independent and decide to obtain a HE degree, while being employed or unemployed. In relation to that last percentage, 82,9% are working full time. Consequently, we understand that 80,5% are worker-students, and therefore, a part-time student. Some of them do not have the support of their employees to attend the University. Consequently, their academic results may be influenced. In fact, we recognise that without a consistent support at work along with a responsibility in the management of all the activities, the adult students will have great difficulty to continue studying.

On the other hand, 53,1% of the adult students chose a course related with their professional area/career. This has a close relationship with some of the motivations they exposed in their personal letters of motivation. In fact, many of them highlight that this is their only opportunity to progress in their own careers, because they have already achieved the top with their previous academic qualifications. Therefore, we also understand that the total duration of the professional activity varies between 1 and 36 years of work.

Academic journey

Continuing with our journey through these adult students' paths, we consider that the academic aspects give us another point of view. The majority (53,7%) have a third cycle school diploma, which corresponds to compulsory education. This also means that the majority dropped out of school when they were more or less 15/16 years old. Nevertheless, 39% have a secondary school diploma and, from this small group who finished secondary school, 65,6% achieved marks between 10 and 13 (in 20). These are not very high marks. However, this could predict that, in any case, they may possess important competences and knowledge that, allied with their professional path and experience, may influence their academic performance at the UA. In addition, from the larger group of the 85 adult students, 30,5% were attending a course in the formal educational system, especially the secondary degree, when they decided to apply for a course at the UA.

Also, from this group of students, 67,1% usually attend professional development courses. This fact points out that they are interested in updating and recycling their knowledge and competences regularly, and respond positively to their work demands and huge requirements - these courses are usually related to their professional careers. We may also observe that, among several types of motivations that they present in their letters of motivation, they desire to demonstrate a good performance in their work, at home and to themselves as well.

Furthermore, concerning the final marks with which the adult students applied for a course, they vary between 10 and 19 (in 20). However, the majority (52,4%) concentrates in the marks of 10-13 (34,1% in 14-16; and 13,4% in 17-20). This could predict that some of them may have certain difficulties in their courses, because they may not possess previous competences concerning several subjects which may be more technical or specific. In fact, not all the work experiences will positively result in verified and specific academic competences and skills.

Nonetheless these marks, they completed at the admission exam and the interview successfully, demonstrate a pattern of conditions and competences that could make it easy and possible for their academic inclusion and development in HE.

These adult students registered on 21 courses at the UA in the following domains: 34,1%: New Technologies of Information; 28,2%: Administration and Public Management; 14,1%: Teachers' Education; 10,6%: Enterprise Relations; and 8,2%: Health Services. The great majority initiated their regular path at the UA, but there were 4 students who asked for curricular equivalence or recognition of professional experiences for some Curricular Units (an aspect that is previewed at the Law-Decree but still does not exist in practice): 2 were approved, 1 non-approved, and 1 is still waiting for the decision.

At the University, only 50,6% of the adult students were approved to attend the second year of the courses (2007-2008). In fact, the majority in the first semester of 2006-2007 did not respond positively to the evaluation period of the Curricular Units. We also became aware that only 49,4% (of the initial group of 85 students) renewed their University registration in the academic year 2007-2008. These last few data underline a high percentage of academic failure and a high number of drop-outs. The next step is to know and understand the reasons that lead to this reality.

Accordingly in relation to the literature review, there are some other important academic aspects that need to be stressed. The adult students:

- “Are more focused and have a self-defined goal prior to re-entering college life” (Shankar, 2004, p.4);
- “Have the status of maturity and developmental complexity acquired through life responsibilities” (Kasworm, 2003, p.3);
- Come to education with intentions; bring expectations about the learning process; and already have their own set of patterns of learning (Rogers, 2002);
- “Are autonomous and self-directed (...); are goal-oriented (...); are practical (...)” (Lieb, 1991, p.1).

Motivations

When we are facing the task of reading, analysing and categorising the letters of motivation written by the adult students, we have to be aware of certain essential aspects: what is said *versus* the un-said; what they are expected to say *versus* what they really think/feel.

Consequently, after the content analysis of these documents we can conclude the following features that we will describe. The main categories are (I) personal motivations; (II) professional motivations; and (III) social motivations.

As we would expect, the personal motivations have a huge significance. Many students focus on the need for self-actualization:

“I feel I have to go deeper in the knowledge that I already possess”; “I need to consolidate and acquire other competences and knowledge”.

This is observed as an opportunity to enhance self-esteem:

“I want to develop my own potentialities and find again my personal value”;
“I want to try to conquer [and initiate] a formative path that allows me

to be in equal circumstances with my husband»; “This opportunity would improve the image that I have of myself, originated by the “stop” I had when I finished Secondary school”.

Necessarily, we would observe that this was an opportunity to make a dream come true:

“Put into practice an old personal project»; “An opportunity to accomplish the dream to attend University/ study again”; “This is an old dream... I was waiting for this opportunity”.

What is more, they demonstrate they are open to new challenges, to broaden their personal horizons:

“I want to challenge my own personal boundaries”; “I have a great will of broadening my personal horizons”; “I have a great will of continuing to grow personally”.

Finally, concerning this point about personal motivations, many adults see this opportunity (they use this word immensely) as a way to be closer to their family, who, in many cases, are a great support to them:

“I want to study with my son who also attends UA”; “This will be an incentive to all my 3 children: to have a mother who studies with them”.

As we have already mentioned many students indicate certain aspects related with professional aspects. Through their letters, we can conclude that they want to be able to give a proper answer to the new demands of the working life and, at the same time, to improve their working performance:

“This working market full of high demands and requirements, competitiveness and need for mobility”; “I want to continue to play an important and responsible role at my work, and with competence. So, I need to improve my knowledge and skills”; “Knowledge advances too fast and it becomes more necessary to possess suitable competences to understand and to face all these new rapid demands”.

Naturally, some of the adult students consider that attending an HE institution and possessing a HE degree may help them to progress in their own professional careers:

“Professionally I intend to become a most competitive and dynamic person, to acquire new knowledge that, when allied to my professional experience, allows me to evolve in my professional career, even more competitively”; “I need to develop other techniques, so that I can advance in my career”.

On the other hand, for those who are unemployed or are at the beginning of their professional career, this is an opportunity to (re)initiate their professional life:

“I desire to start over”; “Broaden my working options”; “I want to invest in my professional future”; “I have a strong desire to find a job that fulfils me”.

Many adult students mention what we can call the social value of an HE diploma. In fact, they feel that attending and studying at an HEI and possessing an HE diploma is a way to enhance citizenship and to demonstrate their commitment to society, where the qualification of human resources is of great importance:

“We have to be committed with society, we need to be better citizens, so that we can critically participate in many discussions, and enhance the

society we live in. We have to be citizens of the world and answer to the multiple challenges, changes and requirements”; “We have to participate in the development and qualification of human resources of our country”.

Moreover, some adults seem to express a consciousness about lifelong learning ideals, also manifesting the idea that education is a universal right. Therefore, this opportunity opened to M23 may be seen only as an imperative that the Government has to fulfil the educational and social systems, because there was an emptiness about the entrance of certain groups (of society and of age) in HEIs. Consequently, we can find statements like the following:

“I share the idea that our personal formative path must be lifelong and life-wide”; “Education is a developmental factor of countries and of the world. Therefore, it is an universal right”.

To conclude, we could not forget to highlight that many adult students continue to underscore the value of a HE degree/diploma almost as a *currency*, due to the social and professional recognition it provides:

“It will allow me to fit in socially”; “I need to prove my knowledge with an official diploma”; “The status that a higher education degree gives”.

Finally, we must emphasise that in one letter we have face to face various motivations. Consequently, we may say that various kinds of motivations live together and complete each other: its complexity and interconnection also reveal the complexity of the human being. Therefore, we can highlight the importance of writing a letter of motivation: it gives the adult the opportunity to, consciously, think about the reasons which impel him/her to an HE Institution. This sort of exposition is essential, so that they understand themselves better: interest, aspirations, expectations, and fears.

Expectations

We must remember that expectations and support were categories explored and collected in the interviews. The semi-directed interview was conducted to those students who gave their authorisation and were available to participate in the research. We interviewed 9 adult students, individually. It is important to highlight that these 9 adult students continued their studies at the UA in the academic year 2007-2008 and only 2 were not approved to the second year of their courses. This interview was made in the June of 2008 (the second year they were attending the UA).

In general, we observed that the expectations are of a different kind, although interrelated. Even though the expectations may be understood as *positive*, most of the students demonstrated one that, concerning the perspective, may be seen as *negative*: the personal sacrifices they have/had to undertake to accomplish their dream and their personal/professional project of achieving an HE diploma. All of them were very conscious about this fact: their professional and above all personal lives needed to be (re)organised; their time, the organisation of all their activities needed to be very controlled. To achieve this, they had to be strict with themselves, so that they did not leave anything behind nor give *bad answers* to their different commitments.

Nevertheless, we consider that they reveal very positive expectations towards their own performance in the course they chose and also towards the University.

Focusing our attention on the expectations about their own performance, 3 of the students stated that their major goal was to achieve high marks in the Curricular Units of their courses. And, although these were the only who mentioned this objective, 6 of them were accomplishing very high marks. Also, one who was unemployed at the time he entered the UA, was invited, during the first academic year, to be a member of a research group of the Department of the UA where he was studying.

Concerning the expectations towards the University, we believe that, before entering the UA, they were very afraid and anxious of saying anything about what they expected or even afraid of thinking anything about what they could find. We suppose this is a normal reaction, because they did not want to be sad or disappointed with the University, with the course, colleagues or teachers. Particularly, they had been out of the formal educational system for many years. So, they did not know what was waiting for them at the University and they were afraid of it. Consequently, in the interview, they only highlighted general references towards the University, services, academic life, or courses. For this reason, we can only systematise the following aspects:

All of them said that they expected to learn many new things, to acquire new knowledge and to develop old and new competences;

Inclusively, 3 of them were expecting that they would learn important and updated subjects which could be actualised in their jobs (these mature students are attending courses that have a close relationship with their job);

All of them mentioned that, because of several commitments and ages, they could not live the academic life so intensely. However, they were not sad about it: they had other goals and responsibilities and, so, they presented other cognitive and experiential purposes they wanted to achieve;

All of them had a high expectation concerning their courses, some specific Curricular Units and also of the teachers. The UA has a very good reputation in Portugal and, therefore, it was also mentioned in their discourses.

We cannot conclude at this point without underlying that this question about expectations was an occasion to make a balance about what they particularly had thought. However, we consider that they did not reveal other type of expectations (in particular, those which are more personal) because they did not feel totally at ease.

In addition, not only in their discourses, but also in all the letters of motivation, the word *opportunity* was used frequently. Therefore, we can point out that, for many of them, this is seen as the last opportunity of attending HE and achieving a HE diploma. In fact, the openness of HE Institutions to older publics/students is observed as a very important measure and policy in our country, due to the low levels of education.

Support

Concerning the major category of support, we can emphasise and distinguish the following:

All the students did not forget to mention the importance of their family. They spoke about their patience, their affection, the strength they were

continuously given by them. One of the adult students shared that his son was also attending the UA. Therefore, they supported each other. The mature student underlined the importance of this phase to his life: to attend the UA, an old dream come true, and to share this great experience with his son.

Three of these adult students were experiencing the support and direct incentive of their employees. One of them, also because of his job, could manage his working hours more easily. But, in order to do that, his boss gave him good support: regularly, he encouraged him, and asked how everything was going at the University. Although other two adult students had more rigid work, their boss showed great support and concern about their steps at the University.

All of them emphasised the importance of their younger (*traditional*) colleagues, because they were very helpful. At the same time, the younger students felt curious about the working and real life. Therefore, the adult students understood they came nearer to them, because they felt anxious about the working life, but also because they comprehended that these worker-students needed some help when they skipped a lesson (we must underline that none of the courses of the interviewees had night classes).

There were a couple of friends who, not only worked at the same place, but also were attending the same course. They were very supportive with each other: when one was more tired, pessimist or discouraged; when one could not attend classes; when one had to manage all their commitments at work and at the UA.

In fact, we consider that the maintenance of adult students on programmes at HE has several reasons. However, the support they may feel is very important, so that they can be stronger in the achievement of their tasks, continue managing all the activities and not be discouraged when they feel more tired.

Conclusion: The end of the journey... for now

This study had the major goal of describing a piece of the journey initiated by some adult or mature students at the UA. In fact, we consider this is a first step to better understanding this *new public* who is entering and studying for the first time in HEIs. The research we have described in this paper was a first attempt to emphasise that these mature students have different characteristics and demands. Consequently, facing this new reality, it is urgent to continue to collect new data, so that HEIs and policy-makers may learn to respond to new challenges, to facilitate students' transition, insertion, adaptation and success, to enrich themselves with changes and diversity, to respond to various requests, taking into account their *Educational Journeys* in an optic of *Changing Lives* for the better.

In fact, this is only one journey: many others must be made by us, researchers, by educational institutions, and also by work institutions. However, the most incredible journey of all will be played by the adult students who never stop questioning. And these may be all of us, who are not accommodated. Therefore, we stress: "The important thing is never stop questioning" (Albert Einstein, quoted by Smyre, 2006, p.1).

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6. CHANGING LEARNING IDENTITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION¹

Camilla Thunborg and Eva Edström

In Sweden, since the 1970's, political motives (Rubenson, 1996) and reforms (Bron & Agelii, 2000) initiated an increasing participation of non-traditional groups in higher education. Non-traditional students are defined as the first generation in a family to go to higher education. The political reforms have focused on access to higher education and from an international perspective, the Swedish system is considered open (Schuetze & Slowey, 2000) and relatively uniform as it comprises all types of post-secondary education. As a complement to upper-secondary education, a diploma from municipal adult education and Swedish Folk High Schools gives eligibility for studies at the university level. There are aptitude tests and for a long time there have been certain quotas for work experience (Bron & Agelii, 2000). Today, women are over-represented and 15 percent have another ethnical background than Swedish, (SCB 2006 A, SCB 2006B). It is common to start studying after the age of 21 (Bron & Agelii, 2000) but working-class students are still under-represented (HSV, 2008).

Research on non-traditional learners concerns issues about entering, experiences of participating, drop-out and retention in higher education. The research shows interesting relations or contradictions between the individual subjects, their background and the educational system. Merrill and Alheit (2004) describe eight types of adult students entering higher education: the integrator, the patchworker, the emancipator, the careerist, the educational climber, the hesitator, the postponer and the formaliser. In research concerning participation in higher education, clashes between learners and the academy have been identified in different ways. Leathwood (2006) shows, for example, that there is a discourse of the independent learner in higher education, which is inappropriate for the majority of students in a mass higher educational system. Coronel Llamas (2006) shows that there are several technologies used in higher education to control and discipline students into the discourse of the 'good student'. Non-traditional learners and the clashes they meet in education are often focused. West (1996) shows, for example that perspectives due to human experience, adult learning, the problems of adult learners and the ways of communicating are underdeveloped in academic institutions which have consequences for adult students. Murphy & Fleming, (2000) identified a clash between 'college knowledge', presented by the universities and 'common knowledge' related to the life experience of mature students. Collier & Morgan (2008) found differences between the first generation students and traditional

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college students concerning their way of interpreting faculty expectations. Quinn (2004) shows that working class students experience a tension between their class identity and the middle class study culture when studying. They also see themselves as facing a paradox of a double failure. They are on the one hand starting to study to get a better job. On the other hand, if they fail and drop-out they are risking a worse job, than if they never entered higher education (Quinn, 2004). Bron & Lönnheden (2004) show on the contrary, that mature students in social sciences and humanities develop a new way of participating in society. They view their meeting with higher education as a democratic process where they gained the self confidence needed for being part of their own life and learning. This chapter focuses on a student returning to higher education for the third time. About 25 percent of students in higher education have been studying before. Most of them are returning to be more qualified due to their earlier studies, occupation or work. Others are starting a new student career (HSV, 2008). The aim of this paper is to understand changes in learning identities in being a student returning to higher education. More specifically we are going to focus on the following questions:

- What experiences of learning can be related to different life spheres and educational contexts?
- What learning identities (what is it like to be a learner, what is learnt and how) are formed due to these experiences?
- What learning crises are connected with those changes in learning identities?

Lena´s journey of learning in higher education²

Lena is in her thirties, entering higher education for the third time in her life. This is her journey in and through higher education.

Before higher education

Lena grew up in a small town in the middle of Sweden. When she was five years old, her parents divorced. She and her younger brother stayed with her father and his new wife. Her mother, barely finishing first and secondary school, was addicted to pills and rather absent when Lena was growing up. Her mother was seriously injured in a car accident when Lena was fourteen, and became partially paralysed. Lena is in contact with her from time to time but is not considering their relation a mother –and daughter-one.

“It´s a difficult contact. I mean, partly because it´s hard to hear what she´s saying and then...we have not any kind of a mother – and – daughter-relation. (...) But somehow I know that she´s my mother. I know that she´s fond of me”.

² The method used in this article is life history. It is based on a biographical interview with a female, mature, non-traditional student named Lena, used for describing her journey in and between educational programmes. At the time for the interview she is soon finishing Magister degree (which is a Swedish degree between Bachelor and a Master degree) in Molecular Biology.

She is describing her father as her supporter in her life. He is an electrician with an upper secondary education. He has been working at a mill and been further educated at work. He is interested in science, an interest that Lena shares with him.

“But yes, my father has been really great!” “...and my father is a scientist just like I am”.

Lena describes herself as ‘good in school’. After nine years she started to study economics in upper secondary school but found it very boring. One year later she changed to a technical school, which requires a supplementary examination in mathematics. Studying technology is really ‘her cup of tea’ and she comes out well.

The learning failure

After upper secondary school she does not know what to do. Her aunt persuades her to apply to higher education. She moves to Stockholm and begins a Masters’ programme at the Royal Institute of Technology. She describes this period of her life as a crisis. She has difficulties coping with the curricula and feels that there is no time for reflection.

“...and then I asked the lecturer because I didn’t understand and I almost got a telling-off. And I felt so bloody stupid!”

She also misses home and her new boyfriend is disturbing her studies. She feels all alone in this new situation and has no-one to support her.

“Yes but all of a sudden everyone....I lost everyone(...) I moved 300 kilometres! Thus...350 kilometres away from home. And father kind of dumped me in some kind of student’s lodging at X and it was the first time I saw my father cry you know...(...)...I have a map of X-town in my head and suddenly you stood there...in that giant city. You didn’t know where anything were situated. It felt so confusing(...) Beyond that I off course had met a boy in X one month before I were supposed to move to Stockholm who was from Stockholm (...) He was supposed to show me Stockholm and everything. I sure was in love and had a hard time concentrating...of other reasons as well... (laughter)..(...) I felt...it was too much. So I intended to take a break in my studies and...a misunderstanding... I didn’t retain my admission place and.. so then I was... I was registered as a drop out and then CSN didn’t allow me any study loans... And then I couldn’t continue at KTH.”

Before the first exam she takes a short break. She works as a secretary in an office, but when she wants to start studying again she has been registered as a drop-out student. She feels that it is impossible to go back and is not getting any aid and loan for her studies. She does not regret anything but thinks that it would have been nice to have a Masters’ of Science in Engineering.

“...I was going to be a Master of Science in Engineering. And I think that...and I think that I would have managed it if I had been more, better kind of prepared. I was extremely tired of school (...) So I believe that if I had taken a year off and had a kind of break then I had kind of made it. (...) It simply was too much.”

The instrumental learner

All of a sudden she applies to the nurse educational programme. She had considered nursing when she was a child, and once as a teenager practiced at a hospital, so she regards this as a good solution. She persuades CSN (the authorities for finance of student aid and loan) to help with financing her studies. She describes the nursing education as unscientific and too theoretical in relation to the work practice. She is interested in the medical practical issues of curing, but is meeting caring in an abstract way.

“Because it is like this, in the eagerness that it should be...a university education with scientific aim. Because it became just...ridiculous(...)
)Because it’s caretaking that is the engine of the education to be a nurse. But when they get unwell? What are you supposed to do then?”

After nursing school she worked as a nurse for eight years but the occupation did not suit her. She describe the job to ‘be like a spider in a web’, ‘serving doctors’ and ‘caring for patients’. She envies her colleagues that are proud of being nurses because she is not. Finally she feels very poor.

“I’ve some difficulties to act like the doctors little servant...(...) you’re really the spider in the web (...). You take care of everything. And then you’ve got to answer for keeping things going. And there are many people you can get a lot of crap from, you know, if it doesn’t work(...)I never felt like a nurse (...). I mean I know colleagues who were kind of really proud of being nurses but I felt kind of that.. ‘so what?’, like that (...) And in that case you had to be a superior to a set of mad women (laughter)...”

Life crisis

When she gave birth and was at home with her son she became depressed. She decided to start studying again, for the third time. This time she was going through catalogues and discusses with her husband about different educational programmes. She finally chose Molecular Biology. To afford the studies they decide to sell their house, and get a cheaper one.

“Thus, I felt really very, very poor because I felt that I kind of was at a crossroad and that I was tramping but I couldn’t come any further and I didn’t know what to do (...) We had to leave our nice house...and then we moved to a small terrace house.”

The good learner

Lena is concerned of how to manage her studies. The study counsellor informs her that this education is tough and that there will be a lot of drop-outs. At the first lecture there are young, unmotivated students ‘slackers’ sitting in the back of the lecture room talking with each other. The motivated students are sitting in the front trying to understand what the lecturer says. Lena thinks that the requirements for getting access are too low. Related to the slackers she is considering herself a rising star, the best of students. She finds new friends among the front students, all younger than her.

“And then you experience this almost...like a day nursery for adults, kind of. Like that. And suddenly you appears like a rising star because

they...I had imagined that I should be like the scrapings and all the others like Einsteins, like that.”

Although the demands on the students are high, Lena thinks that it is a good way for the lecturers to find out what the students understand. She finds her lecturers very supportive as they treat her like an interested adult student. She is now studying ‘real science’ and learns laboratory experiment to practice the real scientific method. She has made a lot of sacrifices to make her studies possible but she really thinks that it has been worthwhile.

“I felt that my brain was kind of expanding every day. It felt so...right. Thus it was so...I can’t explain it. The self-confidence expanded (...) they kind of make heavy demands but it’s not like this set-a-trap kind of way. It’s more like they want to know that you’ve understood what they’ve wanted to say.”

When Lena started studying at the University of Stockholm she does not want to take any more loans. Her income detracts from 25 000 to 2 000 SEK per month. Her husband works full-time, and takes care of the household and their son. He has a Masters’ degree in Chemical Engineering. She describes him as supportive both to her and her fellow-students.

“But we have somehow got used to this. We are living a, mummy-is-always-studying-life. And...and we try to help each other in the weekends and things like that (...) I could ask him (my husband) about everything. He knew everything! Everything about chemistry. That was no problem. Then...we had kind of study circles in my home...(laughter)...”

The future

Lena wants to continue her studies and get a Doctoral degree. She is trying to make a good impression and is nervous and afraid of failing. Her demands on herself have increased. Her gained knowledge and experiences have at the same time made it somehow easier.

“You had to study like an animal all the time just to kind of get it. Now it’s more like to apply what you already can....So it’s not so..it’s not all that deadly anymore I think(...)Now the university means all the world to me!...But now the university is the most important for me. So now when you have to do an account....AAAHHH...(laughter)(...)but now it is this that is kind of my future.”

Lena is trying to live ‘here and now’ and prefers not to think about the future. She thinks that it will be hard to get an interesting job if you are not a Doctor and she worries about her age. She wants to give birth to another child but thinks that she after that might be too old to get the Doctoral degree.

“Right now I regard the future as very open and uncertain. Such matters make me try to live here and now, and I will think that is great (...) When I have get my Doctoral degree I will be kind of 42. Then you might be on kind of the limit to when they do not want to employ you because you cost too much. I don’t know. Maybe you wouldn’t be productive enough.”

In figure 1 we are trying to summarise Lena's journey in relation to different learning identities and crisis.

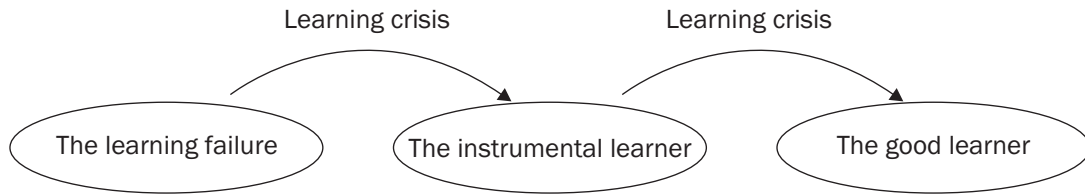


Figure 1. Three learning identities identified related to higher education and the relation and crises between them.

What is a learning identity?

A learning identity is defined in terms of how actors experience themselves as learners in different life spheres. Learning has been given various interpretations and is used in different ways (International Encyclopedia of Adult Education, 2005). Here we are focusing on identity as a social identity. A social identity is related to the presentation of oneself in relation to other groups or individuals in a specific situation or context (Goffman, 1959) a social identity is related to. Two foci could be identified from this point of view. One focus concerns shared presentations by people in an occupational group (Thunborg, 1999), an organisation (Hatch & Schultz, 2005), a community or a specific life setting (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). Another focus is the integration of different life spheres in terms of subjective experience (Salling-Olesen, 2006). Learning as a central concept could be defined in different ways. One distinction attributed to Bruner (1990) is to separate 'learning about' from 'learning to be'. The former seeks knowledge about learning of a given content or a specific subject, while the latter is focusing on learning to become someone. To become a learner in higher education is about how students relate themselves as agents also structured by their social background and previous learning experiences to the specific educational settings (Alheit, 1995). 'Habitus' is used for understanding how the subjective and objective aspects of social life are connected (Alheit, 1995). Social identities are formed in the relation between agency and structure (Giddens, 1984, Ashwin 2008) further develops this by focusing on the interactions between teaching, learning and assessment meaning that interactions shift over time and between situations, due to both structural and agentic factors. These factors are used by actors in their interpretation of a particular situation including an individual biography, the institutional setting, the historical moment and wider social-political factors. The biography views the social order being created in, through and from interactions between members of different life spheres and settings in everyday life (West et al. 2007). Assuming the individual to be an acting agent and considering the agent/structure as having a reciprocal influence (Giddens, 1984) makes possible to get an understanding of how learning identities are formed through an individual biography. Within the concept of agency both intentionality and competence to act are involved. Structures are defined in terms of normative, regulative and cultural processes used in social practices (Scott, 1995).

Learning identities

What is it like to be a learner, what is learnt and how? This is related to how Lena describes herself as a learner in relation to her private life and the educational contexts that she meets. To turn back to Lena's journey described above she could be seen as an intentional, competent woman, deciding her life course, in the relation to different structures like norms, expectations and rules that are taken for granted by her or others in the different context she meets. She is referring to structures involved in her personal and social life. Her family, previous boyfriend, husband and son, friends and the local cultures in the middle sized city as well as the big city are referred to as normative and cultural processes. In meeting with different educational contexts norms about the good student (Leathwood, 2006, Coronel Llamas, 2006), ideals about knowledge (Murphy & Fleming, 2001), faculty expectations (Collier & Morgan, 2008) and so forth could be viewed as normative and cultural aspects. Lena is however, also referring to regulative processes such as, for example, study funding and aid, registration policies at the faculty and discourses related to the good, independent student (Leathwood, 2006; Coronel Llamas, 2006). Behind the structural processes referred to by Lena, both these settings are structured by discourses of gender, class and age.

The learning failure

Figure 2 shows the identity of learning failure. It shows a young person with a technical interest facing faculty demands as a hard curriculum based on the idea that you have to comprehend a lot of information in a very short time and that some questions are really considered stupid by the lecturers. The learning failure identity also consists of experiences of being alone, cut off from family and the local culture at home. It is also about being young and meeting a boyfriend that is not interested in her studies.

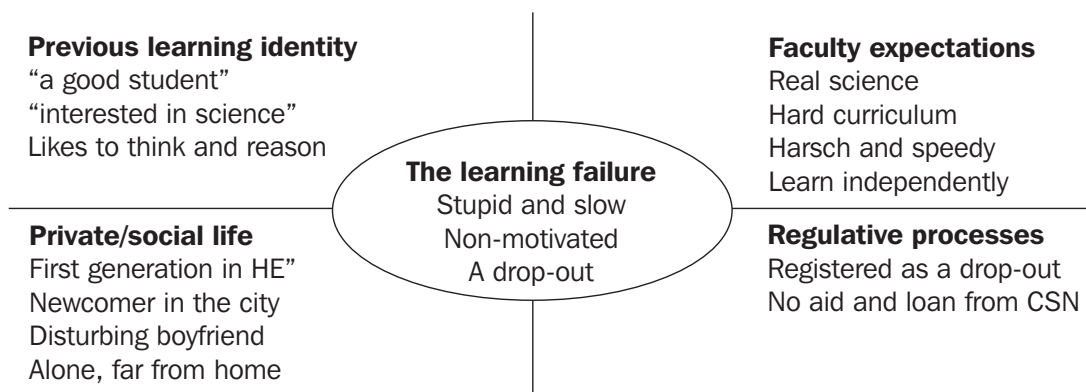


Figure 2. The identity of "the learning failure" related to different settings and structural processes

The instrumental learner

Figure 3 shows how Lena is describing her identity as an instrumental learner and how this identity is related to the educational setting, herself and her previous experiences, the work place norms she meets as a nurse and her private and

social life. The instrumental learning is about meeting all the demands within an education with a distance, never feeling that she is belonging to the educational setting or is engaged in her own education, just studying for her future occupation, without caring for it at all. The faculty demands are here described as unscientific with no connection between what is studied and the practice.

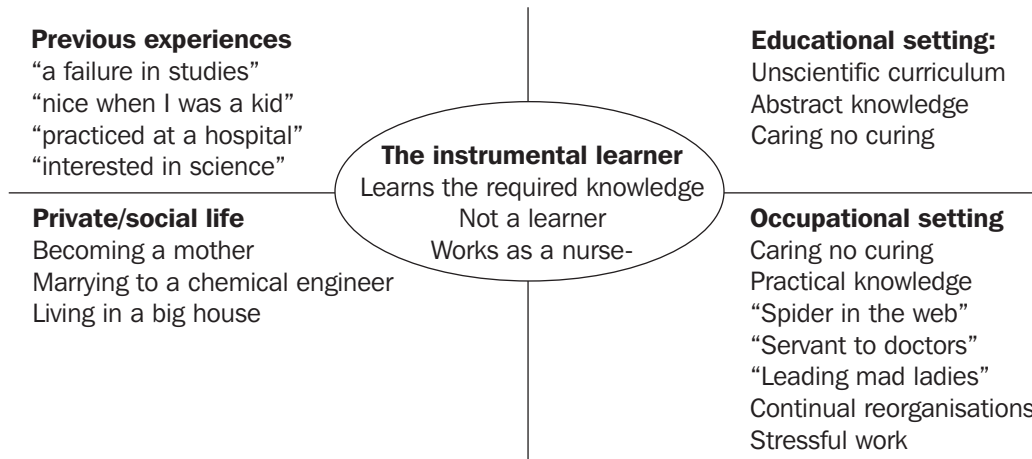


Figure 3. The “identity” of the instrumental learner related to different settings and structural processes.

The education is all about caring not curing, which Lena is interested in. It is also about not coping with the occupation as a nurse. It is a stressful job with continual reorganisations. During this time she settles down, marries a chemical engineer and moves in to a nice house that they renovate together. They also become parents.

The good learner

Figure 4 shows Lena as the good learner, studying “real science”, facing faculty demands and a hard curriculum based on the idea that you have to comprehend a lot of information in a short time. This time the lecturers and her peer students are supportive. Lena finds slackers which irritate her but also make her a rising star. She is also facing economical sacrifices. Her husband is supportive economically, in the household and by helping out in her studies.

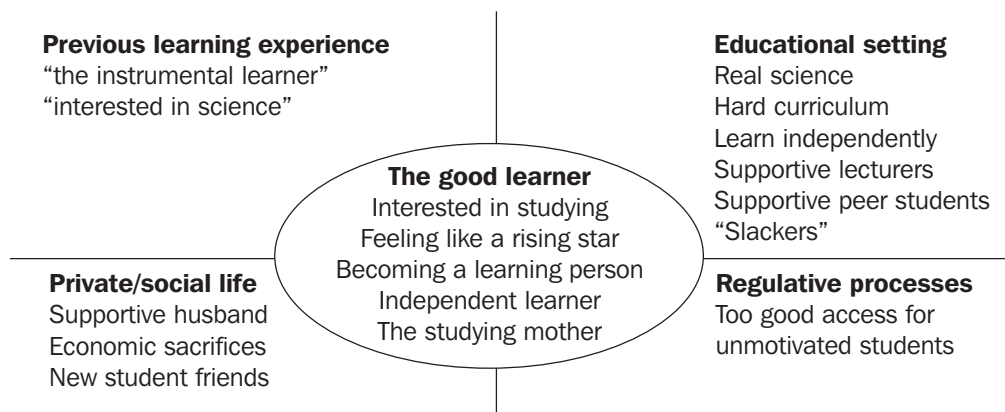


Figure 4. The “identity” of the good learner related to different settings and structural processes.

Changing learning identities?

There are different ways of defining and analysing changes of identities. Changes could be discussed in relation to the duality of structure (Giddens, 1984). As structures are conditions for actions to which individuals act upon and at the same time formed by the actions of agents, structure both implies limitations and possibilities. Changes in learning identities are viewed as a relation between agency and structures as forms of identity crises (Giddens, 1984). Crises are related to changes within a social institution in regulations, expectations or norms as ongoing processes. Agents are seen as competent to act in a different way in social practices, they however tend to reproduce rather than changing (Giddens, 1984). Alheit (1995) uses ‘biographicity’ to analyse how changes between different settings and human crises could be understood both by learners and researchers. The individual biography by Lena shows that she is changing her learning identity in relation to the different settings she is attending. The question is in what way her learning identities could be seen as changed or reproduced in relation to expectations, norms and discourses in education as well as society as a whole. Bron (2000) uses the ‘floating’ concept to understand identity crises. To be floating relates to an experience of being fragmented, without a feeling of a passed and of being unable to create a future. Floating is experienced when people are confronted with a new culture as a consequence of moving from one culture to another. How do actors handle crisis? Reflection is used for understanding how actors change their ways of looking at themselves as learners. Interaction between actors and tensions between institutional settings is often seen as a starting point for the reflective processes (Mead, 1934).

Identity crisis

Lena refers to two major crises in her learning career that changes her learning identity. The learning failure was a change from being a good student in school to a drop-out student. This crisis led her to study nursing but the identity of a learning failure stayed despite the fact that she accomplished to finish. The second learning crisis lead to a depression, described as a ‘crossroad’. During this period she is reflecting (Mead, 1934) about what she is, what she likes to do, and also discussing the crossroad with her husband, finding solutions and making sacrifices. The instrumental learner period, that lasted for twelve years could be interpreted as a period of floating (Bron, 2000). She is studying, learning and working without a feeling of belonging. The life crisis could be seen as a major change as well as a beginning to form a new learning identity. Figure 5 shows the crisis in Lena’s journey and relating them to the different processes.

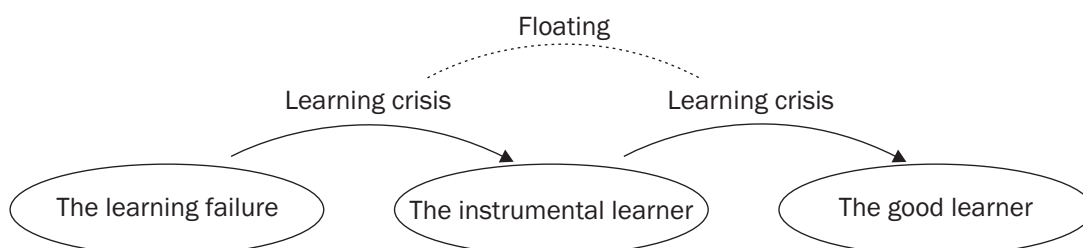


Figure 5. Crises related to learning identities

Returning to learning

To understand changes in learning identities, exemplified by Lena's journey, is to view the social identities that is presented in relation to others (Goffman, 1959) in relation to different life periods and educational settings. The learning identities described here, relate to three different educational settings at three periods of her life. Figure 6 also shows that Lena also is returning to learning.

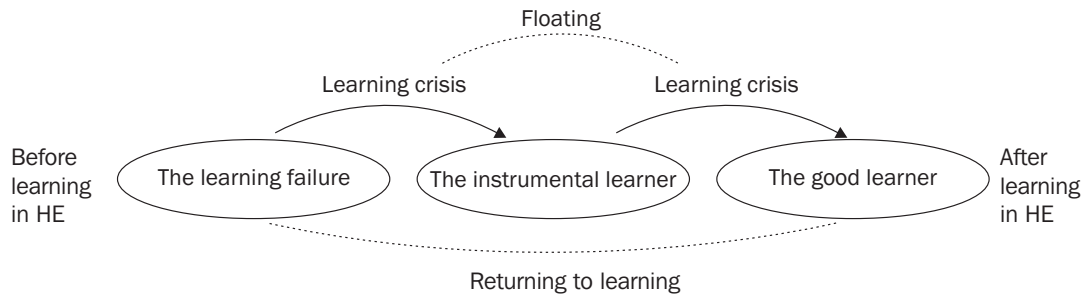


Figure 6. Returning to learning.

Despite the learning identities formed in relation to different educational settings, her concept of the good student remains (Coronel Llamas, 2006; Leathwood, 2006). She has become the good learner, through stages of failure and instrumental learning. She is returning to learning, to her view of real science, an independent learner and meets the expectations that she failed to meet when she started at the university. Her journey also shows clashes between educational settings that relates to her social background, being the first in her family studying in higher education. Despite her interest in technology she fails to interpret the faculty demands viewed as a system for excluding students not passing their first exam (Collier & Morgan, 2008). When returning to learning her situation has changed, not being the first generation student but a returner. She is aware of the faculty demands, appreciates them and longs for harder requirements for access to higher education. In forming the identity of the good student she relates to the slackers, and separates herself from them. She could have become a slacker but she never did. Another clash is related to different kinds of college knowledge (Murphy & Fleming, 2000). Lena refers to real science related to the discourses of science and technology, while the nursing education is considered unscientific. Both educational programmes could also be described as 'genderised' (Connell, 1987; 1995), technology as a male discourse, where men are over-represented (Salminen-Carlsson, 1999) and nursing as a female discourse, based on the idea of caring and being a good woman (Öhlén & Segersten, 1998; Thunborg, 1999). Maybe, Lena's failure in the male discourse had consequences for her becoming a nurse, even if she never becomes the good nurse in her own eyes. Lena's private and social life has also changed. Instead of being young and alone in her studies far from home, she is a mature woman, with a husband, who is experienced in higher education, within the same field as herself. Her class identity has changed as a consequence of both her previous experiences and her situation in life. Her returning to learning could be seen as a revenge for failing and avoiding a double failure (Quinn, 2004). Finally, Lena has been floating for twelve years (Bron, 2000). The identity of failure as well as the instrumental learner could be seen

as learning identities and identity crisis at the same time. She learned to cope with her failure, to work as a nurse and to change her private situation. How she finally got the motivation to broke with the instrumental learning identity and the floating and returned to learning is however not analysed in this article.

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7. PART-TIME STUDY: FULL-TIME COMMITMENT: HOW ADULT LEARNERS PERCEIVE THEIR EXPERIENCES AS LEARNERS IN THEIR FIRST YEAR OF THEIR LEARNING JOURNEY

Anne Ryan

Introduction

Increasing the numbers of individuals in higher education has been a central concern of Government in the United Kingdom over the last decade. Furthermore, access for those adults who traditionally would not attend university has been part of this agenda (The Scottish Office, 1998). This chapter describes an approach taken within one department in a Scottish university that helped to address these issues and provided opportunities to combine study at University with paid employment. The provision of this part-time degree level programme enabled students to study on a part-time basis and gain a professional qualification in their chosen field of work. It explores the reality of participation at this level for mature students with family, work and caring commitments.

The chapter also presents the findings of a small scale research study which aimed to explore the students' experiences of participation in this programme. This includes the students' stories about changes in their learning and working lives as a result of participating in this course. It was decided to undertake some research to try to capture these stories and add qualitative data to the information gathered through the formal evaluation. Within this research it was the students' experiences, perceptions, feelings and opinions that were important and this influenced the research design. In-depth interviews were used to gather qualitative data to explore with students their experiences of the part time route. In the interviews the students described the personal journeys which had led to their decision to attend higher education.

The study found that if the Scottish Government is to realise its vision of a lifelong learning society which seeks to close the gap between those 'who achieve their full potential and those who do not' (2003, p.4) opportunities for flexible approaches such as part-time study should continue to be supported and extended.

The Context

In the 1990's, the widening access to education agenda became a priority for the United Kingdom Government, this was also reflected in many countries across Europe. To ensure participation amongst under represented groups, projects and initiatives designed to facilitate access were realized. This helped engage those who could be considered non-traditional students and was distinct from merely increasing numbers of students. Non-traditional students are regarded as such

as a result of age, income, class and ethnicity, those who could be considered as coming from disadvantaged backgrounds (Bowl, 2003). If the UK Government was to 'fulfil a national policy objective to be world class in learning at all levels' and was to achieve its vision of the creation of a '*learning society*' then the participation of students from all sections of society in courses at further and higher education levels would need to be encouraged and facilitated (Dearing, 1997, p.1).

The momentum for this increased within Scotland through policy development that shaped the participation of non-traditional students in education (Scottish Executive, 1998, 2003, 2007). The relationship between the promotion of lifelong learning and social inclusion has been a key feature of Scottish Government policy for many years, with particular emphasis on the key role of community education. These policies recognised disparity between those 'who achieve their full potential and those who do not' (2003, p.4). To address this widening gap the Government identified a vision to create 'a Scotland where people have the chance to learn, irrespective of their background or current personal circumstances' (2003, p.5). This vision highlighted the significant responsibility that Community Education has in widening access to learning among the most excluded groups. To facilitate engagement in higher education many of the barriers that currently exist which preclude non-traditional students from engaging in educational opportunities need to be addressed. Institutional barriers such as admissions policy, funding, childcare, fixed modes of study needed to be challenged if higher education institutions were to be in a position to support disadvantaged learners' progress on a learning pathway.

In addition to this impetus to widen access generally, the Scottish Government further intimated a commitment to widening access in professional training. This was extended to people who would traditionally be unable to participate in university based courses. A review of the training of Community Education practitioners was commissioned in consultation with this field of practice. Consequently '*Empowered to Practice*' (Scottish Executive, 2003) strengthened the argument that part-time and work based modes needed to be expanded, particularly to meet the commitment to engage non-traditional students. The ability to study in part-time mode offered flexible study and this was seen as being particularly successful in meeting the needs of both employers and students. This enabled students to remain in employment whilst acquiring and extending their knowledge and skill base thus enhancing their performance in the workplace (ibid).

The most recent lifelong learning strategy produced by the Scottish Government (2007), still has its focus primarily on increasing economic growth and the skills required to develop a prosperous Scotland. Proposals include the development of a coherent learning system and closing the gap between earning and learning. The strategy recognises that these are often considered as two discrete elements, with learning generally completed prior to commencing employment. A review of support arrangements to allow adults to pursue both concurrently was proposed which has influenced the development of the Degree programme at the University of Strathclyde. However, contrary to the Government's priority of increasing economic competitiveness, the course retains a commitment to the empowerment of under-represented groups. This is reflected in the admissions policy which encourages students without the traditional university entry qualifications to apply.

The BA in Community Education: Part-time Route

The University of Strathclyde is the third largest University in Scotland and currently has a student population of 29,000 full-time and part-time students. The University of Strathclyde began in 1796 when John Anderson, left instructions in his will for 'a place of useful learning' —a University that should be open to everyone. The University of Strathclyde maintains a commitment to recruiting a student population that is diverse and inclusive. This is reflected in the strategic plans and in the many programmes and initiatives that have emanated from these.

The Community Education Division within the University of Strathclyde has offered training primarily on a full time study basis for community educators since 1964. In response to the Governments widening access agenda and to demands from community education employers, the part-time route to the Degree was first established in 1997 and has been modified cyclically to reflect changes at both policy level and within the field of practice.

The course is offered at degree level leading to a professional qualification which is endorsed by the national training standards body for community education. The professional body defines the values, knowledge and skills of community educators and it is on these foundations that the course has been developed. The values which underpin the programme are: respect for the individual and their right to self-determination; respect for the pluralistic nature of society; equality and development of anti-discriminatory practice; encouragement of collective action and collaborative working relationships; promoting learning as a lifelong process and encouraging a participatory democracy CeVe, (1995).

Community educators work with people of all ages and circumstances, either as individuals or in groups and communities. They seek to help people assess their own needs and make real changes to their lives through community based learning and community action. Informal education, (Jefferies & Smith, 2005) and transformative learning, (Mezirow, 2000) are central to the practice and outcomes of community education.

The part-time route to the attainment of the BA in Community Education was introduced in 1997 and is aimed at unqualified practitioners working in the broad field of community education. It is designed to enable practitioners to obtain a professional qualification and is targeted at those who would normally be unable to undertake full-time study because of existing working commitments and personal circumstances. The course is predicated on ideas of social justice and creates a learning society which provides opportunities for lifelong learning, recognises prior experience and learning and routinely utilises methods which promote autonomous, self directed and reflective learners (Husen in Gorard & Rees, 2002).

The Students' Experience

Students' shared stories about changes that had occurred in their learning and working life as a result of engagement with the programme and it was useful to capture these stories.

The aim of the research was to explore the students' experiences of participation in the part time route. A better understanding of the course from the point of view of participants was sought and it was hoped that the findings would inform future planning.

Methodology

The sample came from one cohort with eight students agreeing to participate in this study. All had completed year one of the course. Each student was interviewed, issues relating to confidentiality discussed and with their agreement interviews were recorded. Within this small scale research it was the students' experiences that we wanted to foreground. It was their perceptions, feelings and opinions that were important and this influenced the research design. In-depth interviews were used to gather qualitative data and explore with students their experiences of study. The interviews were semi-structured to ensure that relevant topics were covered in all the interviews, while allowing sufficient flexibility for students to describe their experiences in their own way (Bell, 2005).

Every attempt has been made to ensure that the conclusions drawn, though the interpretation by tutors on the course in question, are objective and based on the facts of the findings derived from actual data and not on our own subjective opinion (Burns, 2000). The following discussion describes ideas in relation to the research questions. Pseudonyms have been used in the discussion and firstly we will provide some background information about the students.

The students who agreed to take part in the study were all women which is not surprising perhaps as women make up a large majority of the participants on the part time course. They were mature students whose ages ranged between 26 and 55 years. Five of the women had dependent children living with them at the time of the study. Two of the group had gained no qualifications since leaving school while the others had all undertaken some form of learning prior to their attendance at University. The various educational routes to University taken by the women are discussed later in relation to motivation and aspirations. As was mentioned earlier, all students on the part time route are required to be working in a related professional field and in the case of all the research participants this work was undertaken for a local government department.

Motivation and aspirations

In the interviews the students described the personal journeys which had led to their decision to attend higher education. As intimated earlier, the students needed to be employed in a relevant field of practice. For all of the students this experience was significant and had contributed to their motivation to attend University. Two aspects of the workplace experience in particular were identified as being strongly influential.

First was the influence of other workers. Many of the students spoke of the encouragement and support they received from colleagues and co-workers at the same level and from line managers. Often this was offered over a long period of time before an individual felt able to take on the challenge of study. For example Valerie had worked for 10 years in various part time and casual posts before she considered qualification despite receiving encouragement from her manager throughout this time.

The second significant aspect of the workplace was a concern for professional development and progression. Through their work experience many of the

students had become aware of gaps in their knowledge and they viewed study in higher education as a way of adding theoretical perspectives to their practical experience. For some, working alongside colleagues who were qualified had led them to feel that they wanted to be in a stronger position to exert influence. All of the students envisaged the professional qualification as a route to promotion at work. For some this was linked to earning power while for others it was simply having greater choice of available jobs. Family commitments were mentioned by three students, but as a motivating factor rather than as a barrier. Mary's daughters had attended university and they encouraged her to apply. Alison and Jan spoke of the time being right for them to consider their own careers, now that their family were no longer dependent on them.

The women had clear educational and career goals. They wanted to develop their knowledge and skills in their chosen job and they saw the professional qualification as a route to career progression, greater influence at work and increased earning power. However all of them spoke of personal goals with equal fervour. For each of the students a sense of achievement, from completing their degree was very important. They spoke of proving to themselves that they were capable and of achieving long held ambitions. Most could recall negative experiences from School which had a profound on their confidence to undertake further study. This is how Mary described her hopes and aspirations:

"I left school at 15. My father had died. I felt as if everything had ended. I didn't see the point of doing more but it was always there. A friend had done it... so it's a personal goal that's been at the back of my mind. I have been to night school, so this has been my ultimate goal. But I didn't really ever see it happening. I didn't think I was that academic."

Fears and anxieties

Many of the students in this cohort had to overcome a variety of problems and obstacles which represented potential barriers to their participation in the course. As mentioned earlier, some students had dependent children and they said that finding adequate child care presented a problem. In contrast to the students whose family had grown up and now offered encouragement, these students could not consider part time study unless their young children were cared for. For all of the students in this situation, it was the help and support of family and friends that allowed their participation on the course to take place.

Economic considerations were at the forefront of students' minds too. Some students had to reduce the numbers of hours they worked and they worried that they would not manage financially. It was clear from the interview data that the part time nature of the course was crucial for the students. For example some spoke of having to adjust to changes in their financial situation but for most this was something they accepted as a short term sacrifice made worthwhile if a qualification boosted their earning power. The part time course allowed these women to continue to earn while pursuing their educational, personal and career goals.

"It gives people like me the chance to get a degree. If the part time degree wasn't there, there is no way I would have the guts to give up two jobs and go to university, Frances."

All of the students reported having worries prior to their attendance and they described fears that they would not be able to cope with the academic demands of university. Valerie, in common with others, described this as a feeling of not belonging.

“Even coming to the interview, I thought ‘what am I doing here? This isn’t for me; this is for people who are cleverer than me’... I thought ‘am I doing the right thing?’...there was definitely a lot of anxiety there, Valerie.”

Many of the fears and anxieties expressed by the students at the start of their attendance on the course were alleviated during their participation in Year 1.

The women spoke enthusiastically about their study and stated that their confidence had increased. This was a particularly strong theme which was identified in the interview data. Feelings of increased confidence and belonging were echoed in many of the interviews. One of the reasons given for this was the support that the women had received from fellow students. The realisation that other part time students had experienced similar difficulties and overcome them contributed to this. In addition the support of staff was identified by the students as crucial, especially in the early stages of their university career. As Alison put it ‘there are strategies in place to support us’.

For some students, the new knowledge acquired was applicable to their existing work. For them this was very motivating as their studies had helped increase their understanding of the work they were doing and they had a sense of their own performance improving. Mary described this feeling as ‘everything falling into place’ and other students had this to say:

“I needed to work, to be earning and I needed to be not working during the school holidays, Alison.”

Taking all of this together, the part time course appears to have been successful in providing an opportunity for those who cannot afford to give up work to study for professional qualification. For many the result is the application of new knowledge in the work place, increased confidence and a better understanding of the aims and objectives of community education.

Lessons from practice

In listening to the students recollections of their experiences and in considering the range of barriers non-traditional students face, the following section discusses some of the strategies that this programme has implemented to facilitate access and progression. Barriers identified included: entry qualifications; the ability to sustain long-term study; finance; personal and work commitments and the academic capability to study at this level. Feedback from students indicates features which serve to make the programme accessible and supportive are discussed in this section.

Admissions policy

Recognising that admissions policies within higher education tend to exclude non-traditional students, entry to this programme takes a portfolio based

approach to assessment of Accreditation for Prior Experience and Learning (APEL). The traditional entry qualifications normally required are removed thus truly widening access (Gorard et al. 2007).

The use of portfolios in this context has two purposes to provide entry into the programme and to accelerate progress. The portfolio based approach enables students to compile effective documentation that supports their learning gained from previous professional practice. The creation of a portfolio encourages students to engage in reflection, critical analysis and evaluation (English, 2005). This process can help to foster a sense of value through an acknowledgment that their experience is valid and transferable to a formal learning setting which can develop confidence in their ability to participate in a course of study such as this. As studying part-time can inevitably equate to long-term study, the use of the portfolio based approach can accelerate the length of time a student may have to study.

Widening access is not merely about increasing the numbers of students studying at University, but is more about retaining students and ensuring progress and achievement. Students that are hard to reach can also be hard to retain, therefore, merely attracting students into existing programmes with traditional modes of attendance is likely to be unsuccessful. This particular programme has a flexible attendance pattern and is structured around the working lives and personal commitments of students. This is crucial in retaining non-traditional students in higher education. If students are to overcome personal pressures then there needs to be a degree of flexibility within courses. (Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998 cited in Gorard et al, 2006).

Low Self confidence

The issue of low confidence and self-esteem is a reality for many mature students. Many aspects of the programme were cited as making a positive contribution to tackling this, such as receiving credit for previous experience and learning. Another important contributory factor is the teaching methods used by the teaching staff. Tutors do not work on the principle that they have all the knowledge and that students do not. As students who are working in this field of practice they have developed a wealth of experience and knowledge. This is utilised through the student-centred methods which forms the ethos for teaching and learning on this programme. The knowledge that students make a positive contribution to this process, affirms their right to study at this level. This in turn acknowledges that they have a positive contribution to make to the learning of others can raise levels of confidence and self-esteem.

“I’ve managed to find this person inside me that I didn’t know existed. It’s built my confidence. I feel more informed now, Hannah.”

Workplace

The students on this programme are, in the main, mature students and whilst they are currently in employment and therefore earning, as unqualified practitioners they tend to be on low incomes. There is currently no Government

funding for part-time study in Scotland, therefore many students are self-funding. The flexible attendance pattern enables students to earn whilst they learn which enables them to engage and progress whilst satisfying the needs of their employer.

The women spoke enthusiastically about their study and stated that their confidence at work had increased. This was a particularly strong theme which was identified in the interview data. Jan described how she felt about it:

“My confidence levels have increased. I’m more confident in trying new things and have put myself in situations I wouldn’t have before. I feel a bit more knowledgeable, I’m more confident within the team that I’m working with. I feel as if I am part of it and can understand what they are saying.”

Support strategies

For these students and many others, returning to study can often be their first formal experience of learning since attending school. They can feel ill-equipped to cope with the various demands of academic study such as essay writing, making presentations, time management etc. This can affect self confidence and lead to anxiety when undertaking formal assessments. Services offered within the University to counteract these include advice on study skills, guidance on health, counselling services and learning support for students with disabilities.

Placement

In addition to academic study, students undertake periods of practicum, which contributes to providing what is termed by De Corte et al, 2003 as a powerful learning environment and offers students the opportunity to apply and develop their knowledge and skills and link academic learning in a new setting through critical reflection on new experiences (Moon, 2006). Whilst it would be desirable for a student to undertake practicum on a full-time basis as the educational gains would be considerable, obligatory work commitments can pose a restriction on the time a student may commit. Therefore this particular programme adopts a flexible approach to practicum and tutors work with the student to secure a placement which extends their experiences but which takes account of the competing demands of both the workplace and personal commitments.

Personal Tutor

The success of the programme can be attributed to these and many other factors. The sustained support offered by personal tutors throughout the programme has been highlighted by students as one such crucial factor. Members of staff teaching on the BA in Community Education who adopt this role are committed to meeting with personal students throughout their time at the University. This concurs with evidence found by Powney (2002) that sustained support impacts positively on both a students experience and an

Institutions retention rates. Personal tutorials offer support and encouragement, academic guidance and learning support. They also monitor personal and academic progress and offer the opportunity to discuss and agree students' personal learning plan and suitable practicum placement. These are informed by an assessment of the portfolio created as part of the recruitment process together with the identification of areas that required to be developed.

Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview of major policies that have influenced the engagement of non-traditional students in higher education. The BA in Community Education: part-time route offered at the University of Strathclyde is one model within higher education that has been particularly effective in recruiting and retaining this student group and helping them to develop in their career. The success of this course is due to many factors, however, a flexible mode of delivery and robust support structures are key requisites.

The part time course appears to have been successful in providing an opportunity for those who cannot afford to give up work to study for a professional qualification. Furthermore the combination of part time study with workplace experience seems to support the students' ability to make links between their classroom learning and professional concerns. For many the result is the application of new knowledge in the work place, increased confidence and a better understanding of the aims and objectives of community education.

This is borne out by the students' experience captured in the qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews. In this research project, the motivations and aspirations, barriers and fears of this particular cohort have been explored. This has extended knowledge and understanding of the non-traditional student in this setting and has helped to increase our awareness of the sensitivities facing students. The course at Strathclyde has been influenced by these and responsive strategies have been developed and implemented. The process of listening to students and responding to needs will continue, recognising however, that there is institutional constraints influence the nature of the response made. If the Scottish Government is to realise its vision of a lifelong learning society which seeks to close the gap between those 'who achieve their full potential and those who do not' (2003, p. 4) opportunities for flexible approaches such as part-time study should continue to be supported and extended.

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8. DEVELOPING ACADEMIC SUPPORT STRATEGIES FOR NON-TRADITIONAL ENTRANTS TO UNIVERSITY

Helen Godfrey and Kendall Richards

Introduction

The authors will provide a background to the development of policies at Napier University, Scotland that have promoted access to students who have been studying at further education colleges for the first one or two years of their study, completing an HNC or HND programme or an equivalent qualification. (vocational degrees) According to the most recent statistics, the intake of full-time undergraduates at Napier includes 46% of mature students compared with Edinburgh University who have 10.9% (Higher Education Statistics Agency 2008). In recent years the number of international students who are direct entry students to Napier programmes has increased from countries in Europe, India and China and includes a minority group of mature students.

The diversity of student experience, expectations and understanding of what studying at Napier will involve provides a challenge for tutors and lecturers. The paper will focus on the importance of understanding how to accommodate this diverse population of students who have been socialised into a different institution and now have to make adjustments and learn a different way of doing things in order to complete assessments to a satisfactory level and achieve a degree. The literature discussed in the paper confirms that universities expect students to conform to their way of doing things in regard to academic writing and often fail to realise that the students may need to be socialised into a new academic community of learning and that assumptions of what they know and do not know should be made explicit (Wenger 2002, Baynham, 2002, Lea and Street, 1998 and Duff, 2003). A small pilot study was carried out with a group of new direct entrants to the Business School (2008 intake) and the preliminary results of this pilot study will be discussed.

Napier background

Napier University is one of the former Polytechnic Colleges that became a university in 1992. It has always had strong links with industry having been a former College of Commerce and Technology. Through a series of re-structuring programmes there are now three Faculties, the Business School, The Faculty of Computing, Engineering and Creative Industries and the Faculty of Health, Life and Social Sciences. Napier is a multi-campus university with three large sites and some smaller more specialised sites around the City of Edinburgh. The University attracts students from further education colleges who can articulate to year two, three or four of a degree programme, particularly in the Business School, the School of Computing and School of Engineering and Built Environment. Articulation arrangements between the university and the colleges as well as a number of international institutions have been established and direct entry students include students from Europe, India and China.

Development of the Academic Support Adviser Role at Napier

Funding was provided from the Wider Access Premium (2000) to support 0.5 posts in the Faculties and other Scottish Universities also appointed Academics Support Advisers but the roles and management varied as did the titles given to the individuals. These new roles helped establish support within each Faculty and allowed each person to make personal contact with both staff and students to develop their role and the provision of academic support. These roles have been in some cases expanded regardless of funding.

Literature review

According to Read, Archer and Leathwood (2003) students have already begun the process of confronting and negotiating the rules of the game of university life before they begin their studies. Students desire to 'fit in' and belong at university has an impact on their choice of institution, particularly amongst working class applicants. Each institution has a distinct 'academic culture' that influences the ways in which students and lecturers think, speak and write in their own institution. It is difficult for new students, particularly direct entry students to higher levels of a programme, to gain an insight to this knowledge of 'how things are done' unless the institution makes some provision for the students to attend an orientation or bridging programme that addresses these issues. A lack of understanding on the part of the student can leave them feeling isolated. Students at Napier who seek academic support often express their concern that they have no previous experience of some of the assessments methods and feel that tutors have forgotten that there are new students joining the university who do not have the same knowledge about 'how things are done'. Students who have attended the bridging and orientation programmes feel that they have a better understanding of what is expected and are also more confident to ask questions in order to clarify what is expected by the tutors. However not all direct entry students attend one of these programmes.

Independent learning may also be a new concept based on an ethnocentric, masculine ideal of the 'traditional student' having few domestic responsibilities, financial concerns or need for support (Read, Archer & Leathwood 2003). Mercer (2007) suggests that assumptions are made by colleagues about students in groups, failing to differentiate between year 1 students and direct entry students who are entering a higher level of a programme, assuming that they are all equally familiar with and share the same understanding of the rules. If students fail to follow these rules they may be regarded as uncooperative or even academically weak. At Napier it has been found that tutors have different expectations of what the format of an essay or report should be which creates confusion in the mind of the student who may be taking modules from different subject areas. Science and Arts subjects often have very different expectations in terms of academic writing style. (North, 2005). Lillis and McKinney (2003) point out that assessments are developed within a social and educational context. The possibility of misinterpreting what is required or expected by the tutor can lead to a misjudgement of understanding by the tutor of what the student has understood the task to be.

Indeed Hicks (2003) argues that classroom discourses are not givens, but are social constructs, which are never neutral or value free. For many the culture of university is alien and potentially the discourse of academia may represent a new language. On top of this, they have to contend with the specialist discourse of the discipline that they are entering. Assumptions based on perceived common shared knowledge, language and experiences can lead to miscommunication and misperception.

Duff (2003) asks how newcomers to an academic culture learn how to participate appropriately in the oral and written discourses and related practices associated with that discourse community. The answer, it seems, involves developing one's voice and identity in the new learning environment. Duff gives the example of learning scientific discourse as involving learning to think, act, speak and write like a scientist in a community of practice. North (2005) also identifies the different approach expected by Science and Arts subjects and points out that students need to know what is expected of them in these different subject areas. This can be problematic for students studying for a joint degree in Science and Arts subjects. According to Papen, (2005: 45) academic literacy practices set conventions for writing and standards for achievement. Essays and reports are a dominant form of literacy in higher education and to a large degree a student's success depends on the ability to write according to the standards and conventions laid out by the university. This can be confusing for students when different subject areas have different expectations and interpretation of what is meant by an essay or a report.

If different contexts demand different types of literacy the view of literacy as an individual skill ignores or minimises the social components of literacy. Literacy is a social practice rather than a set of technical skills and if literacy is a social practice it varies with the social context and is not the same uniform thing. (Street, 2003).

Approaches to academic literacy

From the work of Baynham, (2002), Lea and Street (1998), Duff (2003) and Wallace, (2003) the following approaches to academic literacy have been identified.

Traditional – 'sink or swim/osmosis

Students should arrive equipped with the skills necessary for study or pick them up as they go along. It is not unusual, to hear colleagues assert that academic skills should be a pre-requisite of university entrance. This ignores the fact that any change of environment and institution requires a transitional programme to enable students to make the change and adapt to new ways of doing things. It cannot all be done in advance and is part of the change process. This approach suggests that no provision is made for the direct entry students to enable them to make a successful transition.

Skills based or a study skills approach

This assumes that literacy is a set of distinct skills that students can learn and transfer to any discipline. It may focus on 'fixing' issues. Students may be taught or directed to generic study skills material but these materials may lack the subject context which would enable the student to understand how the skills applied to their subject area.

This approach allows some acknowledgement that the students need some support but it is often implemented by directing them to generic study skills materials or a generic module without a subject related context. This approach was used at Napier as part of a tool-kit initiative to require all programmes to include a year one skills based module. This was frequently unpopular with the students and attendance was poor which suggests that the students did not value or see the purpose of the modules.

Academic socialisation perspective

Here students are inducted into a new 'culture' of academia including, for example, writing conventions. This would seem to make an assumption of a university or Faculty as relatively homogenous while the disciplines in the Faculties in Napier University have general agreement there are variations in these written conventions.

This approach attempts to make some provision but does not fully acknowledge the need for a discipline context.

Practice-based/embedded academic literacies

This model is closely allied to New Literacy Studies which sees literacy as social practices. The literacy demands of the discipline may vary from other disciplines and students may need to switch genres, disciplines and fields appropriately. This applies especially to students who do a combination of subjects from areas of Business, Science or Arts subjects. The skills needed are scaffolded and embedded within the module and any materials should be discipline/module specific.

This approach acknowledges that the students need to understand what is expected within their subject discipline and provision is made within the module. There are examples of this approach used within Napier but it depends on individual tutors to integrate and embed the skills required within the module programme.

Bolt-on

This would apply to a stand alone module or programme which is credit-bearing and part of the programme structure but focuses on 'study skills' or the development of a 'toolkit' for students. Here the focus is developing skills within a discipline yet, still provides isolation and a generic approach.

This approach is used particularly with first year students but in the Business School at Napier it has been found to be difficult to convince students of its worth and there is no evidence that the students will transfer the skills to the next level of their programme.

The Bridging and Orientation Programmes provided for direct entry students at Napier use an approach that includes a focus on the study skills and the context of the discipline that the students are going to study. In addition the students have time to adapt to a new academic environment and have an opportunity to become socialised with peers who will be studying on a similar programme. These social groups frequently become lasting study groups throughout the students study at university.

Work by Bartholomae (in Clark 1992 p119) and Wenger (2002) adds further insight to the experience of new university students. The importance of identity and the way in which students learn, according to Wenger, through the categories of engagement, imagination and alignment, contribute to the debate about how students become knowledgeable about how things are done in different institutions and even in different subject areas.

Identity

Bartholomae (in Clark 1992:119) suggests that every time a student sits down to write for university teachers, they have to invent the university for the occasion, and invent the university that is, or a branch of it. The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try out the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding and arguing that define the discourse of our university.

Here Bartholomae touches on issues directly relating to students in our university and non-traditional students in particular, how we view our position and meaning in the world and how we are identified. This is also linked to language and discourse and our social identity in particular communities of practice.

This is certainly something that has been observed when working with groups of students at Napier who are mature students entering as direct entrants from other institutions. Academic Support Advisers provide opportunities for these students to discuss the transitional issues through workshops, classes within the programme of study or one to one appointments. The authors have particular experience of working with students in the School of Computing and the Business School at Napier.

Wenger (2002) investigates how learning occurs in organisations and larger learning communities. He describes a threefold categorisation of ways of belonging to a learning system which can be directly applied to the bridging and orientation programmes at Napier in the light of non-traditional direct entrants.

Engagement

The first part of the categorisation is engagement. To engage in a community of practice participants need opportunities to interact with others. This opportunity is provided through the orientation/bridging programme pre-entry to university at

Napier, and activities are carried out throughout the first semester. Students who are unable to attend a programme or are not offered one recognise that they are disadvantaged when they meet other students on their programme of study.

Imagination

The second categorisation is imagination. Participants need to imagine themselves as part of a community of practice, and again the orientation/bridging programmes do seem to help with this. The programmes also help facilitate reflection which is a valuable skill and helps students understand how they learn as an individual and as a member of the wider academic community.

Alignment

The final categorisation is Alignment. Wenger argues that this need not and should not be a one way process. There is potential for transformation of a community and individuals. It would seem that most of the transformation is on behalf of the direct entrants who need to align themselves to the expectations of the university.

The ideal of apprenticeship into a community of practice is somewhat problematic for direct entrants. It would seem that there is a perception on behalf of some colleagues that direct entrants bring with them the necessary skills for participation in the programme of study or at least will pick it up as they go along. This often is not the case though, as the experience in college and industry is often very different to the experience and expectations of university. This approach suggests that tutors relate to the osmosis model of academic literacy discussed by Baynham (2002), Lea and Street (1998), Duff (2003 and Wallace (2003).

Furthermore, there is not always explicit modelling or teaching of how to participate in the university from lecturers and little opportunity to pick these skills up from fellow students. Students may need to learn how to ask relevant questions and participate in discussion in tutorials with students who have already had one or two years experience of being in the university environment. The orientation/bridging programmes enable students to gain an insight into what is expected and participate in activities which will aid their understanding of learning, teaching and assessment issues.

Finally, direct entrants are not a visibly different group from students who have been at university since year one, especially in large lectures. It is easy to forget that there may be students who have transferred from a different course who have not progressed with the same cohort of students and have similar transfer difficulties.

Perceptions of Students Entering University

One of the concerns voiced by many groups of students is whether or not they actually belong at university due to their age, background (socio-economical and educational) and the way that they speak. 'Will I sound like a student?'

Rassool (2000) suggests that identity is linked to multi-dimensional discourses of self, being and belonging and 'otherness'. In fact Bulcholtz (2003:148) argues that linguistic practices can often reveal important social information that is not available from the examination of other community practices alone.

In order to address some of the issues discussed in the literature and to respond to student feedback, Napier has developed short orientation programmes and a pre-entry module. Both include further support from the Academic Advisers during the semesters.

Bridging Programme (Effective Learning and Career Development module)

In 1997 some of the academic staff at Napier recognised that students who were entering a higher level of their programme and had come from College, felt isolated, unprepared and did not feel that they had managed to integrate within the student community. In response to these concerns a programme was developed with the aim of enabling the students to integrate socially, learn about the university in terms of the teaching, learning and assessment methods and become familiar with the culture, norms and values of the university.

It was decided that these aims could be met within a two week programme which would be delivered before the start of semester one so that students would feel familiar with the university, have made friends and topped up their academic study skills and in some cases acquired new skills that would be needed in order to study at an advanced level. Since 1997 approximately 1,000 students have attended the programme. The content and method of delivery has changed dramatically from lecture based with practical tasks to workshop based which focuses on the 'learning by doing' approach. The cohort of students attending the programme in September 2008 included a large number of European students (50%) who were studying Business Management. The internationalisation of the group provided a challenge to both tutors and students and it highlighted the importance of providing this kind of induction/ orientation opportunity to all groups of direct entry students.

Content of the Programme

The aim of the pre-entry programme, which is a credit bearing module for those who choose to include it as part of their academic programme, is to familiarise students with the learning, teaching and assessment strategies used within the university, enable them to become familiar with the library and computing facilities and become part of a social group. The programme is delivered on a workshop basis with each group of 25 students working with a tutor and facilitator. The teaching material is based around practical group work activities and includes note-making methods, academic writing, communication and presentation skills, critical thinking, referencing, group working, reflection and tips and techniques for studying. A session on career development is included and this aims to encourage students to think ahead regarding future careers and employability skills.

The students complete a group presentation at the end of the two week programme and submit a reflective report at the end of the first semester. A file of resource materials is given to the students which they can use when tackling assignments in the future. The students report, that the materials provide a useful resource to them.

Tutors and Facilitators

Tutors are recruited on the basis of experience and skills in working with students to deliver the workshops. The facilitators are selected from students or graduates who have reached their final year or are studying at post-graduate level and are able to share recent experiences of studying the same subject discipline as their group of students. The role of the facilitators is to assist the tutor and to support the students. This adds value to the student experience as they are able to give examples and discuss how they adapted to studying and making the transition from college to university.

Pilot Project of Napier direct entry students to the BA Business Management Programme

A group of new direct entry students to the Business School were asked to complete a simple questionnaire on the first day of attending a pre-university bridging course.

The aim was to find out what their perceptions were of the characteristics of a typical student and how they saw themselves in comparison to the characteristics that they listed. The students were also asked what challenges they thought that they would face as direct entry students. 42 students completed the questionnaire and 14 students volunteered to be interviewed at a later stage in the semester as a follow up to their experience as students at Napier in their first semester.

Wenger's categorisation of engagement, imagination and alignment offers an interpretation of aspects of what it means to belong to a learning community. It is interesting to know how the new students perceive themselves and others in terms of the characteristics of a typical student.

Student perceptions of the characteristics of a student

In response to the question regarding typical student characteristics a wide range of words were given. The most frequently mentioned words used were Hardworking, independent, focused, open minded and determined.

When describing their own characteristics the most common words used were similar. The words used most frequently were

Hardworking, independent, goal centred, determined, and organised

When responding to a question regarding challenges that the students would face as direct entrants the most common responses were

- 1) Understanding and practicing the language.
- 2) Settling in and understanding the methods used at university.

- 3) Getting used to a new environment.
- 4) Not knowing people prior to entry.
- 5) Managing the work/study/family balance.
- 6) Fitting in to already formed classes.

These responses suggest a group of motivated students with concerns about making the transition and finding their own identity in a new academic environment which relates to the work of Wenger (2002), and Bartholomae (in Clark1992).

At the end of the two week programme the students completed a short evaluation questionnaire.

Feedback from students

60 Students from the cohort of 96 filled in the qualitative evaluation and feedback questionnaire following their participation in the bridging course. The following points were made by the students

- 1) The programme achieved its aims.
- 2) It provided an opportunity for socialising and networking with peer groups.
- 3) The sessions provided an understanding of 'what is expected at university.
- 4) Tutors and facilitators were very supportive.
- 5) The development of skills was linked to subject areas when possible.
- 6) 99% of the students would recommend the module to other students.
- 7) Group work in the workshop sessions was appreciated as a way of 'learning by doing'.
- 8) Academic writing and referencing sessions were seen as important for future studying.

The feedback comments suggest that the anxieties and concerns articulated at the beginning of the programme had been addressed and that the students felt more confident to begin their new subject programmes. It is recognised however that immediate feedback has limitations in assessing what the student has learned and it is often not until the students have to apply their skills that they discover what they learned on the bridging course and what resources are available to support them. Nevertheless the feedback gives some insight to their experience. Focus groups will follow up on issues raised and allow a more detailed assessment of the student's experience in semester one. The reflective report which students submit at the end of the semester allows an opportunity for them to review their skills and set goals for the future.

It is not possible for all direct entry students to give up two weeks to attend the bridging course module and a shorter orientation programme has been used in the School of Computing for direct entry students.

Orientation programme in the School of Computing

Each year the Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Creative Industries takes in a large number of mature students directly into the second, third or fourth year of their studies on a variety of programmes. An orientation programme designed

for this group of students (35 attended in semester 1, 2008) is delivered by the Faculty Academic Support Adviser (ASA) who works closely with other lecturers in the Faculty. Following the orientation programme the ASA supports the group of students through their first semester of study in their new programmes. The students have the opportunity during the programme to become familiar with the School and the programme that they will be entering. The aim is to enable them to gain skills that will be useful to them in their academic study. From observation it has been found that participants from different backgrounds need to learn and share 'ground rules and common knowledge' (Mercer, 2007). For many of these students, this is the first experience that they have had of formal education, apart from college, for many years. A significant number of the participants usually identify as having left school early and as being from non-traditional backgrounds in terms of higher Education.

Through this intensive two-day programme and follow up sessions in semester one, it has been observed that the direct entrants, who are newcomers to a learning system, become part of the university and academic wider community. The two day orientation programme facilitates activities which engage the students at this pre-entry stage to enter into a community of practice through their interaction with each other and the university facilitators. This relates to the first categorisation of engagement as described by Wenger (2002).

The Programme also facilitates reflection and this allows the students through activities to reflect on their experience and identity as a student and member of the community that they are entering. This relates to the imagination stage of Wenger's categorisation.

The transformation of the student should be a two way process according to Wenger but it would seem that within the university direct entrants have to align themselves to the expectations of the university. The feedback from the students participating in the orientation programme suggests that they value the experience and benefit from participation in the programme.

Conclusion

The student experience of direct entry students who are usually mature, highly motivated but frequently anxious about their ability to cope at university could be improved if tutors were aware of the approaches suggested by Wenger and the wider literature discussed in this paper. Students who have the opportunity of attending pre-university orientation and bridging programmes at Napier report positively about their experience both from a social and academic viewpoint. The bridging programme is of a sufficient length for the students to form social and study groups with their peers and feel familiar with the university environment.

The use of facilitators enhances the student experience and continued support from the Academic Support Advisers provides continuity of support at a Faculty level. The authors would suggest that provision should be made for all direct entry students to address issues of socialisation, adapting to the teaching and learning methods and allowing them an opportunity to become familiar with the university environment. If these issues are addressed and provision is

made for the students before they start their programmes of study they will feel more confident and appreciate the embedded and ongoing support that is also important for all students.

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9. “ALWAYS ON THE OUTSIDE, ALWAYS LOOKING IN”: ETHNIC MINORITY WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES OF EXCLUSION FROM HIGHER EDUCATION COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Jacqueline Stevenson

Introduction

“Everything was so new. I just felt stupid. I spent my whole time watching and trying to copy and making mistakes. I never felt I belonged. I was always on the outside, always looking in” (Rupinder, level 1 student).

“I was very scared that I was saying something wrong and that people would, if not in front of me maybe behind my back, laugh at the way I was speaking and what I was doing” (Isha, level 1 student).

The UK literature on higher education is dominated by studies exploring the experiences of working-class students (of difference, exclusion, ‘otherness’ and loss of identity). In contrast, middle class students are seen to be thriving in HE ‘as fish in water’ (Bourdieu, 1990: 163) to the extent that ‘middle-class mature students can talk easily in terms of becoming ‘the real me’ through higher education’ (Reay, 2001: 337). However, as Brooks has found ‘implicit in these studies seems to be an assumption of a unitary and homogeneous middle class’ (2003: 291). The reality is quite different. Both the quotes above are from ‘middle class’ women from ethnic minority backgrounds who had already gained HE qualifications, or had studied at a higher education institution (HEI) in their home countries.

Here I describe the experiences of six women, all currently or recently studying in HEIs in West Yorkshire, UK higher education institutions whose identities have been forged by the structural, practical and attitudinal processes which have inhibited their movement from peripheral to full members of higher education communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). These women all had former identities as qualified, skilled, professional, confident women, successful in their previous milieus. Restarting their lives in a new country (as a consequence of either arranged marriage or dispersal to West Yorkshire under the Asylum and Immigration Act (1999) they expected to access HE as a ‘fast-track’ route to employment and inclusion and as a way to overcome loss of status and return to professional standing. However the institutional opportunities presented including the types of learning, teaching and assessment activities offered, the mode of study entered into, the extracurricular activities available and the institutional support given to those with financial or childcare needs have worked to deny participation in institutional communities of practice, so maintaining a peripheral identity - as women on the outside looking in. I conclude by making recommendations as to how educators can change institutional practice to ensure that participation:

“refers not just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the **practices** of social communities and constructing **identities** in relation to these communities (Wenger 1998: 4).”

Communities of practice

Communities of practice refers to the process of learning that occurs and shared practices that emerge when people who have common goals interact: 'over time, this collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations. These practices are thus the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise. It makes sense, therefore to call these kinds of communities, communities of practice' (Wenger 1998: 45). Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that most explanations of learning processes overly focus on cognitive learning theories and neglect the fundamental social character of learning. Instead people learn through active participation in social communities and that 'information stored in explicit ways is only a small part of knowing' (Wenger, 1998: 10). In their seminal work (1991) Lave and Wenger described how members of professional communities –midwives in the Yucatan, Vai and Gola tailors, naval quartermasters, meat cutters and alcoholics anonymous– initially enter a community of practice at the periphery and, over time, as they learn the community's customs, codes of conduct, social mores and language, move to full and legitimate participation, negotiating and re-negotiating beliefs, understanding and meaning through their practice. Peripheral engagement may enable individuals to try out a new identity on an experimental basis, allowing them to transit from one social milieu to another with minimal risks, and 'gradually assemble a general idea of what constitutes the practice of the community' (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 95). Eventually, through on-going participation, the formation of a new learner identity becomes possible whereby 'we know who we are by what is familiar, understandable, usable, negotiable' (Wenger, 1998: 153). This leads to eventual full participation in the community of practice, enabling learning to occur. Legitimate peripheral participation, therefore, provides a theoretical description of how newcomers become experienced members of a community of practice, construct their identities through these communities, and then continuously create their shared identity through engaging in and contributing to the practices of their communities.

Participation and non-participation

Communities of practice are organised around some particular area of knowledge and/or activity, within which members are involved in a set of relationships over time giving members a sense of joint identity (Lave and Wenger, 1991). While the community of practice literature is more developed in relation to the workplace, and in higher education with the development of communities of practice amongst academic staff, this approach is also a useful heuristic, in helping to understand higher education learning as practice for *students* and in conceptualising student *participation* in those communities.

Whilst Lave and Wenger argue that 'learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners' (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 29), other research has shown that for non-traditional learners who start from a position of 'difference' the movement from peripheral engagement to full engagement is distinctly

more problematic. It is possible that some learners, as argued by Lea (2005), may deliberately choose to remain on the periphery of a community of practice, since this is a way in which power can be retained and own sense of identity maintained. However for others institutional structures and practices may work to deny participation. The ways in which this is played out in an institutional setting can be seen in recent research by Stevenson *et al* (2008) into participation in extra-curricular activities (ECA). Their research found that that many students deliberately used participation in ECA to move from peripheral to full learners within two different communities of practice: participation in ECA to support the development of a student identity and participation in ECA to support the development of an employee identity. For some students the choice of ECA was linked specifically to developing the knowledge, skills and experience to be successful in a competitive labour market in a chosen field – for example law students undertaking mooted or debating activities, or sports students undertaking voluntary coaching work. Other students were participating in ECA to provide themselves with the skills, knowledge, networks and recognition to become ‘expert’ students. For these students, participation in either of these communities of practice resulted in the development of different and distinct learner identities. However, the research also showed that other students, primarily due to caring responsibilities, or because they were working part time or lived at home, were unable to participate in university-provided ECA and so were less likely than other students to move from the periphery of a community of practice to the centre. This non-participation resulted in the development of an alternative identity –what the researchers called ‘the On-looker’, with non-participation engendering feelings of loss, separation, isolation and difference (Stevenson *et al*, 2008). These feelings have been found in other research with non-traditional students: for example Christie *et al* (2007) found in their research with non-traditional entrants into an ‘elite’ university that these students ‘were only ever partial and fragile members of the wider community of practice and their engagement with ‘proper’ student life engendered strong emotional feelings of ambivalence and dis-location’ (p. 25).

The consequence for many students is that ‘when peripherality is a position from which an individual is prevented from fuller participation, it is disempowering’ (O’Donnell and Tobbell, 2007: 326). For students who have been in positions of authority, or have held status within the family, community or the workplace, disempowerment can be deeply demoralising, whilst the contrast between high level expectation of what higher education can offer and the subsequent low level reality can be severely disheartening. This is reflected in the experiences of six ethnic minority women: three refugee women and three women originally from India, living in the UK as the result of arranged marriages. The refugee women were initially part of a study and Employability Skills project funded by Equal, an ESF-funded programme that ‘tests and promotes new means of combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities in the labour market, both for those in work and for those seeking work’ (Equal, 2007). Following participation in the programme the women all went on to study at UK HEIs. The three Indian women attended a level 1 university accredited module at Leeds

Metropolitan University funded through 'Embedding Equality in Diversity and Learning' project¹. Two of the women went on to study for further HE courses. The six women are:

- Dominique²: a 30 year old business woman from Cameroon who has lived in the UK for the last seven years. Forced to flee Cameroon without her two children, Dominique enrolled on a variety of courses on arrival in Leeds. She has recently been reunited with her children and is now enrolled on a BA (Hons) in Business.
- Monika: a 31 year old Muslim woman from Ethiopia. She arrived in the UK in 2003 with her husband, was granted refugee status the following year and resettled in Leeds. Monika had studied for part of degree in her home country but left university to work as a journalist. She has a two year old child and is currently studying for a BA (Hons) in Business and Management Studies.
- Habiba: a 49 year-old Iraqi refugee who has five children, two of whom still live in Iraq. A dentist in her home country Habiba is now studying for a degree in Public Health. She has indefinite leave to remain in the UK and lives with her two youngest children, one of whom has learning difficulties.
- Isha: a 35 year old woman who completed both an undergraduate and a Master's degree in India and works part time in a community development project. She has two children and speaks three different languages.
- Noor: a 29 year old Sikh woman. She moved to Leeds to when she married her husband and has one small child. She completed a degree in India and has worked part-time in her family's business since arriving in the UK. She is now studying for a Foundation degree in Youth Work.
- Rupinder: a 24 year old Sikh woman originally from Gujarat expecting her first child. She studied for the first year of a degree in India but did not complete when she moved to the UK to get married.

Research with the women was conducted using a mixed-methods approach: a combination of semi-structured interviews, informal discussion, observation during group work activities and excerpts taken from their academic writing.

'Always on the outside, always looking in'

A community of practice has three inter-linked characteristics which forge the identity of those who participate within it: a *shared domain of interest* (with a commitment to the domain), with members involved in *joint activities* (sharing information and building relationships) as *practitioners*, rather than just having a shared interest (Wenger, 1998). It is this practice that gives members their sense of joint identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Here the domain of interest refers to participation in higher education, activities to the development of social relationships and the sharing of information in the classroom and outside of it and practice to the undertaking of predominantly curricula but also extra-curricular activity. This practice results in the formation of student identity(ies).

¹ Funded by European Social Fund Objective 3 Co-financed monies through the Learning and Skills Council for West Yorkshire

² Names changed to protect anonymity

A shared domain of interest

All six women referred to in this paper had had some experience of higher education in their home countries (these had invariably been highly positive experiences) and saw gaining a UK HE qualification as integral to their future career or personal development plans. They were passionate about studying for a UK degree either because of the desire to gain a specific UK qualification or because access into HE was considered a route to other outcomes such as greater confidence, better integration or increased language skills. This was particularly so for the refugee women. In an attempt to re-establish lives torn apart by displacement, bereavement and trauma, many refugees regard higher education as a ‘fast track’ route to high level employment, (re)-gaining self-esteem and professional standing and integrating into their new communities. The barriers faced by refugees in attempting to access HE are numerous (Stevenson and Willott 2006a, 2006b, 2008). However a small number of refugees do manage to make the transition to higher education and their aspiration and expectations of what they will gain through attending a UK university are invariable high, particularly as higher education can help them ‘move on’. As Habiba explained on starting an HE course: ‘I was depressed because I’d lost my home and my job. But now I’m feeling much better. I feel like I’m starting to climb the ladder’. This is similar to the views expressed by the three Indian women. The women all had high regard for the value of higher education *per se* as can be seen in this comment from Noor:

“In my opinion education is very important than everything in your life, if you have got a qualifications and experience then you can do everything and you can earn money lots. I never felt earning a living was much more important than education.”

However, since their move to the UK meant that they were starting a new life in an unfamiliar country away from family and friends they also saw higher education as a route to social networking, confidence building and the opportunity to integrate more widely into the local community. As Rupinder stated ‘studying at university means the chance to meet new people and to practice my English. Something I wouldn’t get outside of the university’.

In other words all six women had a deep commitment to a shared domain of interest. Unfortunately, despite high aspiration and intent it was the inability of these women to participate freely and easily in joint activities that subsequently inhibited their movement from the periphery to the centre of the community of practice.

Involvement in joint activities

The second characteristic of a community of practice is that ‘in pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other’ (Wenger, 2004: 2). However, the women described in this study all faced both practical and attitudinal barriers in trying to build the requisite relationships to enable these types of activities to happen.

Whilst difficulties with forming relationships and socialising are shared by many students, specifically those who live at home (Holdsworth, 2006) or those who work (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006), the students referred to here had multiple barriers to forming relationships –both practical and psychological.

The practical barriers faced by the women are exemplified by Monika. Three years after arriving in the UK Monika was accepted for a place on a degree course. She had very high expectations of her course, expecting to be able to form social networks and make new friends, as she had easily done in her home country. However several months into her course she expressed her deep disappointment that she had made so few friends. The other students on her course were predominantly younger, lived in university halls of residence and their socialising was generally centred on being in places which serve alcohol, something which Monika's religion prohibits her from doing. In addition, Monika has a small child which, along with other family responsibilities, prevented her from having much free time to socialise, again inhibiting the development of social relationships with fellow students.

Aside from practical barriers, many of the women found it harder for psychological and attitudinal reasons to form friendships and socialise with their peers than other students. For example many refugees may have significant, and often unmet, emotional and mental health support needs. Aside from the impact that poverty, social exclusion and inadequate accommodation can have on mental health, refugees will, by definition, have experienced some form of conflict, crisis, trauma or abuse. These experiences are compounded by the isolation, upheaval and separation experienced in fleeing one country and attempting to settle in another. This is exemplified by Dominique. Once settled in the UK Dominique enrolled onto a series of English and IT courses at an FE college but found attending college a constant struggle recalling that:

“I was proper sick and depressed when I came here. I couldn't cope. I didn't get my assignments in on time but tutors gave me lots of support. One particularly understood what I was going through. He told them at the meeting they had about me that I was sick and not just lazy. I didn't want to speak because I didn't want to talk about my private life.”

She eventually completed the course and enrolled for a BA (Hons) in French and Public Relations. Without significant and intense support she was unable to cope and dropped out. Two years later she re-applied for university and enrolled for a business degree. However, her on-going mental health problems means that she has found it exceptionally difficult to relate to the other students on the course and form relationships with them. She has spent the first few months of her degree rarely speaking to the other students. Difficulties in forming relationships have impacted heavily on the ability of these women to join in discussions, participate in shared activities and learn from other students, which in turn has inhibited their ability to implement *practice* within their communities.

Practitioner activity

As stated by Wenger ‘a community of practice is not merely a community of interest –people who like certain kinds of movies, for instance. Members of a

community of practice are practitioners' (2004: 2). However, in common with many other international students both the refugee students and the Asian women had difficulties which created problems in relation to assessment, learning and teaching activities and therefore in their ability to *practise*. First, for all of them, English was their second language and they lacked confidence in speaking out in front of others, as this comment from Rupinder makes clear:

“When I just started to speak English in front of people, I was very scared that I was saying something wrong and that people will, if not in front of me maybe behind my back laugh at the way I was speaking. In a way this made me feel stronger, because all I had in my mind was that I needed to succeed, and to succeed I would have to face many hurdles.”

Next, again in common with other international students, although the women had studied in higher education previously, the modes of teaching learning and assessment they were familiar with were very different to those they encountered in the UK, for example understanding of plagiarism and effective essay and report writing skills. In addition, many of the women did not have the same levels of independent learning skills as other students on their courses and needed significantly more direction from academic staff, at least in the early stages of their studies. This was explained by Habiba who (although she had qualified as a dentist in Iraq, run her own dental practice and brought up her three children as a single parent in the UK) was not used to having to self-direct her own learning to the extent she was expected to do so in the UK. As she commented: ‘when I ask them what I need to do they just say ‘that is for you to work out’ but, as she went on to state, if she had been able to work it out she would not have gone for help in the first place. A further aspect of ALT activity which was difficult for both groups of women was undertaking reflective practice. Over the last decade reflective learning has made increasing inroads into the HE curriculum, embedded in many forms of ALT activities and in personal development planning. Whilst much of the literature suggests that many learners willingly engage in such processes, other research has shown many students do not value personal knowledge and their own role in the construction of expert knowledge (Stevenson and Willott, 2007). In addition, many refugee students find the actual process of reflection difficult, particularly when it might trigger unhappy memories. As Habiba commented, reflecting on her learning meant thinking not only about her past experiences in Iraq but also made her think about her two oldest children who are at university in Baghdad and who she was forced to leave behind when she left the country. Consequently she was very reluctant to participate in reflective activities.

Whilst over time members of a community of practice should ‘develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems –in short a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction’ (Wenger, 2004: 2). For many non-traditional learners this is deeply problematic. The combined difficulties of (often perceived) low English language ability, lack of requisite academic communication skills and barriers to undertaking reflective practice means that, unlike many other students, many non-traditional learners find it significantly more difficult to become ‘expert practitioners’. Rather than engendering positive changes to identity, for many students their experiences

result in feelings of loss, rejection, failure and isolation. The women described in this paper had all been expert practitioners in HEIs in their home countries. They should have been able to be expert practitioners in UK institutions and yet they were not. They all had a deep commitment to higher education and yet, despite their efforts and determination found that they remained predominantly 'always on the outside, always looking in'.

The need for institutional change

All students, including those from diverse backgrounds, need to be able to develop the requisite skills and relationships to enable them to become expert practitioners within a community of practice. Many universities have programmes of language support, study skills development and acculturation activities for international students. However, these are often not freely available to 'home' students. Other support services, freely available to the women within the HEIs they attended, are often not accessed— either because students are not aware of them or because they are reluctant to ask for help (Willott and Stevenson, 2008). Signposting students more readily to support services, and making those additional support measures for international students available for all students, would help to provide them with the requisite tools to be able to 'practise' effectively. Providing social activities which are not based round alcohol, and which are at times and places which all students may be able to access (rather than in the evenings) will also help in the development of social relationships. Better social relations will support better engagement in joint activities which will in turn facilitate increased practice and so support students in their transition from the periphery to the centre of a community of practice (Willott and Stevenson, 2008).

However, and more significantly, all six women referred to in this paper brought immense skills, experiences and resources to the academic community. They were resourceful, aspirational, multi-lingual, experienced talented women with wide ranging experiences of education in international settings. Yet these contributions were under-valued and under-used. The ways in which certain forms of knowledge, skills and abilities are privileged by certain groups has been described by Yosso (2005) and is reflected in the experiences of these women. It is imperative that HEIs recognise the multiple forms of capital brought to the institution by students from ethnic minority backgrounds. These include aspirational capital (the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers); Linguistic capital (the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style; familial capital (including a commitment to community well being); social capital (networks of people and community resources); navigational capital (skills of manoeuvring through diverse social institutions) and resistant capital (the knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behaviour that challenges inequality) (Yosso, 2005: 77-80). The women described in this paper were rich in capital in each of these areas. Had this capital been better recognised, accepted and valued by the HE institutions it is likely that their participation in communities of practice would have been much greater and their experiences significantly more positive.

Conclusion

Supporting non-traditional learners to develop skills and build relationships is clearly important if we are to ensure that all students are able to move from peripheral to full membership of a community of practice. However, it is equally important that HEIs recognise the diversity of their student body and ensure that the activities which students are being encouraged to participate in reflect the diversity of the skills, knowledge and experience of the whole student body, including ethnic minority women. This will help to ensure that the identities of other ethnic minority women are forged through full participation in communities of practice, and are based on experiences of inclusion, togetherness, sharing and equality.

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II. ADULT AND FURTHER EDUCATION

10. 'BILDUNG' AND SELF-DEVELOPMENT IN THE LIFE-COURSE

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Problem Outline

This paper deals with the concept of 'Bildung', widely used in German educational science. 'Bildung' in the sense of intentional forming the self is among the most complex actions. It is constitutive for human existence, because 'Bildung' is closely related to meaning. The authors of the OECD Report 'Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCo)' assert that the ability to develop and realise a life plan is a key qualification for life in the twenty-first century (Rychen & Salganik, 2003). This example, which is situated in the semantic field of 'Bildung', shows the great relevance attached to 'Bildung'. This high regard for 'Bildung' is by no means specific to the twenty-first century: Thus Wilhelm von Humboldt wrote: 'The true purpose of a person ... is the ... forming of his talents ... into a whole' (Humboldt von, 1792/1947: 21). The purpose of human existence given here by Humboldt attributes the greatest value to 'Bildung' in human life.

'Bildung', as I understand it, extends from childhood to advanced age. In view of the relevance of 'Bildung' for people, pedagogical, andragogical, and gerontological action is essential for furthering it. This is to be developed over the long term before the background of the human blueprint for 'Bildung' in the life course. The purpose of this contribution is to examine the architecture of 'Bildung' in the course of the life span and its relation to self-development. For this purpose relevant models of a blueprint for 'Bildung' will be derived.

'Bildung' is defined as action to create a self that is held to be valuable. By the self is understood the complex system of psychic dispositions of one's own self. 'Bildung' has the purpose of lending human life meaning, sense; for in the process of 'Bildung' the person reflects on the determination s/he wants to give her/himself. Thus with Humboldt the person should have a final aim, a first and absolute standard, and this final aim must be closely and directly related to his inner nature (Humboldt von, 1792/1947). A person's own image design emerges from his basic values. 'Homo oeconomicus', as an example of an image of man, acts rationally in regard to her/his own aims, is intent on maximising her/his own advantage and reacts to restrictions in order to purposefully achieve maximum aim fulfillment with the available resources. The aims of "homo oeconomicus" serve profit maximisation, which represents a basic value for this type of person.

On the human blueprint for 'Bildung' in the life course and self-development

To systematically classify the action of 'Bildung', I take recourse to Hoff's and Evers' model of action regulation (Hoff & Ewers, 2003).

They distinguish four levels of action:

- 1) Level of everyday action
- 2) Level of action beyond the everyday
- 3) Level of biographically significant action
- 4) Level of identity action

It becomes clear that the first three levels, first that of everyday action with concrete, repetitive and quickly realisable actions (e.g., going shopping), second that of actions going beyond everyday action units as monthly or annual projects (e.g., renovating a house), and third that of biographically significant actions that set the switches for life and span several years (e.g., choice of a course of studies and studying), do not represent 'Bildung' in the sense defined here. 'Bildung' is to be located on the highest action level, namely that of identity action. 'Bildung' is neither repetitive nor quickly realisable. The action of 'Bildung' aims at image design and the realisation of the self, at the transformation of a complex system.

'Bildung' is not just characterised by the multiplicity of conditioning factors for the realisation of the self, but rather also comprehends further characteristics of an open problem. The aim of 'Bildung' is not fixed, sub-aims can be contradictory, and the conditioning factors of reaching an aim can be opaque, dynamic and cross-linked. Overall, it is clear that 'Bildung' is a demanding action. If 'Bildung' is identity action, then a relatively low consciousness of this action can be inferred, for generally formulated identity aims not characterised by a clear end state are stored in the implicit mode.

'Bildung' does not just span several years, but rather the entire lifetime. 'Bildung' is so very time-consuming, because only with increasing age can the complex subsystems of the self become modifiable and the objects of 'Bildung'. With reference to the 'theory of the ontogenesis of the self,' according to Robert Kegan (Kegan, 2005) it is clear that 'Bildung' can typically only take place in its complexity with increasing age. Kegan examines the ontogenesis of the self in stages: The stages are based on the 'ways of knowing' that determine how a person forms meanings. A specific subject-object relationship characterises the type of knowing: The *subject* is that in which one is involved, with which one identifies, that one feels and subjectively experiences as oneself. The *object*, in contrast, designates that which the person views, about which s/he reflects and that s/he can change. If her/his way of knowing changes, a transformation occurs: The subject becomes an object. The following example illustrates this transformation: A person identifies her/himself with a professional role and experiences it as her/himself. If a subject-object transformation occurs, the person can experience the professional role as being a role and a modifiable object in that s/he recognises what dependencies exist between characteristics of situations and thoughts and feelings in connection with professional action. Phenomenologically viewed, part of a transformation is the discovery or creation of the other that the person previously regarded as her/his own self (Kegan, 2005, 107ff.). Such an objectivation process, which is a process of becoming conscious, occurs throughout life; the person creates objects. Simultaneously, a loss of the subject occurs that leads to self-definition, for at every new stage

in the ontogenesis of the self a person is better able to recognise who s/he is, because s/he has more ability to examine and change her/himself. In all, Kegan identifies six stages in the ontogenesis of the self that are described in their specific subject-object relationships (Kegan, 2005, 107ff.):

Stage 0: The incorporating self

Subject: Reflexes, movements, feelings

Object: -

The new-born child lives in a world without objects in which it experiences reflexes, movements and feelings.

Stage 1: The impulsive self

Subject: Perceptions, impulses

Object: Reflexes, movements, feelings

On this stage a world is created in which the child can recognize objects as wholes separate from himself. The movements and feelings of the first stage become the object of attention. The new subjectively experienced forms are perceptions and impulses.

Stage 2: The sovereign self

Subject: Concrete things; viewpoint: role concept, simple reciprocity; enduring dispositions: e.g., needs, self-concept

Object: Perceptions, impulses

With the self-development of dispositions a person acquires a self-concept. Likewise s/he develops a new sense of freedom and power through the ability to control specific perceptions and impulses. At this age the person acquires concrete knowledge in that he recognises and names objects. However, it requires a qualitative leap, a transformation of the subject-object relationship in order to be able to classify these facts in more comprehensive abstract ideas, categories and value systems.

Stage 3: The interpersonal self

Subject: Abstractions: conclusions, generalizations, hypotheses, ideals, values; viewpoint: reciprocity/inter-personalism: role-consciousness, interactive reciprocity; inner condition: subjectivity; self-consciousness

Object: Concrete things; viewpoint: role concept, simple reciprocity; enduring dispositions: needs, self-concept

The transformation on this stage is characterised in that a person develops a comprehensive understanding of her/his needs, as well as of the world, has internalised the values of the environment and can hold her/his own in a traditionalistic world, because it is consistent with a definite and stable set of expectations. The person is of course able to think abstractly and share feelings with others, but s/he still does not experience her/himself as a person independent of others; the self decomposes into a multiplicity of interactive relationships, thereby there is a lack of a coherent, unified self.

Stage 4: The institutional self

Subject: Abstract systems: worldviews, relationships between abstractions; institution: relationship regulating forms, multiple role-consciousness; authorship: self-regulation, identity, autonomy

Object: Abstractions: conclusions, generalisations, hypotheses, ideals;
values: reciprocity/inter-personalism: role-consciousness, interactive
reciprocity; inner condition: subjectivity, self-consciousness

Characteristic for this phase is the shift from shaping by the environment to individual self-responsibility. The person has now developed an inner authority that enables her/him to determine for himself what is of value and to distance himself from the educational process and the acquired psychic dispositions. The transformation to a self-determined consciousness enables the person to live successfully in a changeable, pluralistic society. Here the self maintains a harmonious coherency and acquires an identity. However, there is still no basis to be able to recognise the limitations of this institutional 'I', of this inner authority. This change in a person's life marks an important point in 'Bildung'.

Stage 5: The super-individual self

Subject: Dialectical: trans-ideological; inter-institutional: interpenetration of self and other; self-transformation: interpenetration of various self-systems

Object: Abstract systems: ideology, relationships between abstractions;
institution: relationship regulating forms, multiple role-consciousness;
authorship: self-regulation, identity, autonomy

At this stage a person has recognised the limits of self-determination and the one-sidedness of her/his own intra-personal system. Interpretations of experiences are felt to be one-sided and incomplete. The new worldview integrates contradictions and oppositions, the person's thinking is now dialectical. This realisation leads her/him from a self-determined to a self-transforming consciousness. The self becomes transformative and can disengage itself from an incorrectly understood value orientation for which the maintenance of the personal 'institution' has become an aim in itself. The person can move between various psychic systems that are now part of this self. Relationships at this stage are of a supra-individual nature: both partners can preserve their identity.

Overall it is clear that, on the longitudinal dimension of the action of 'Bildung', there is an increase in the complexity and permanence of the transformations of the self in the life course. Only with an advanced position in the life course can complex systems of the self be transformed and become the objects of 'Bildung', since in a person's earlier life phases they are not perceptible as objects and cannot be modified. Theoretically, with an advanced position in the life course a person's aims of forming the self become more complex. Metaphorically viewed, the spiral of complexity of the transformations expands in the course of life. Correspondingly, from a problem-theoretical viewpoint the system of intermeshed conditional factors becomes more differentiated and dynamic, which explains the increasing permanence of the transformations at each stage. A very surprising insight gained from this theoretical approach is that 'Bildung' in all its complexity first becomes more probable with increasing age, since only then can the self become an object. Related to this are the insights of Brandstädter (1999, 58), who has studied the relationship between the intentional and unintentional formation of the self: 'As development forms action and intentionality, intentional action gradually comes to form

development'. The unintentional formation of the self is not further examined here. The relationship to and the significance of unintentional formation of the self for 'Bildung' is to be examined in further studies.

The component actions of 'Bildung' on the longitudinal dimension can be structured on the basis of the modifiable subsystems of the self over the life course; the component actions in the cross-section can be referred to, drawing on action regulation theory, as 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' actions. 'Bottom-up' actions generate central aim states from the lower action levels, while 'top-down' actions concretise on the lower action levels the image patterns that are central for action.

'Top-down' actions offer, together with superordinate identity aims, a comprehensive perspective for the structuring of the self, link the multiplicity of concrete aims between the levels of action (vertical coherence) and further the instrumental relationships between actions on a level (horizontal coherence). The coherence, as the integration of aim structures, made possible by the 'top-down' actions of 'Bildung' works against the fragmentation of action and contributes to the formation of meaning. With the aid of 'top-down' actions, from identity aims the person derives sub-aims for component actions on the lower levels. In dependence on the development of the self, the superordinate identity aims vary in their complexity. Identity aims are typically stored in the implicit mode. They thus make it possible to place a specific type of attentiveness, vigilance, at the service of the aims. The action initiation of implicitly represented general aims is accelerated by this congruency-oriented attentiveness: 'One does not necessarily need to consciously ... search the environment for opportunities for the realisation of intentions, but rather one automatically perceives such opportunities and uses one's action repertoire for their realisation' (Grawe, 1998, 77). The general aims and the congruency-oriented attentiveness attached to them lead ideal-typically to a coherence of the aim system, thus also to a vertical coherence. 'Bildung' as action means coming to terms with identity aims, which as 'Bildung' should be made conscious, in order to give life meaning. Using an example, it will be shown why such coming to terms with identity aims is beneficial for 'Bildung'. Identity aims imply valuations, here a person's most general basic values. The most general behavioural activators are motives acquired in childhood that, because of their emotional anchoring, are hard to change. They are based, like identity aims, on general valuation dispositions. Studies have shown that in many people there are considerable discrepancies between identity aims and motives. Only rarely are identity aims congruent with motives. Why is it important that motives should be congruent with aims? Motive-congruent aims are more likely to be achieved than motive-incongruent aims, as they require less effort of the will. Increased effort of the will exhausts more of a person's resources, creates more negative feelings, and weakens the will. Likewise in the case of increased effort of the will, access to the self is impeded (Kehr, 2004). Since many people have motive-incongruent identity aims, these are to be adapted to dominant motives. This process occurs, among other things, through projective methods.

'Bottom-up' actions generate central aim states from the lower action levels. Identity aims are generated through action on the lower levels. For the sake of

clarification, a mechanism is suggested for how this aim generation can occur. In his theory of *somatic markers*, Damasio (2001) shows the close connections of emotions, corporeal feelings and reactions. As forms of corporeal expression, somatic markers can ‘...be employed as a *diagnostic control system for self-congruence*’ (Storch & Krause, 2005, 48). They show when a person has made a decision on a lower action level that is motive-congruent. In everyday action it can thus already be purposively explored whether concrete action is motive- and self-congruent. Furthermore, disorienting dilemmas such as life crises or life changes can be intentionally used to make conscious and put in question schemas of assumptions and expectations, e.g., ones that determine the person’s thinking, feeling and action (Mezirow, 2006: 24ff). Since the schemas of a person’s thinking, feeling and action are among other things no longer conscious through becoming automatic, in agreement with Dirkx (2001) it is necessary to carry on a dialogue between the conscious and the unconscious. Dirkx assumes that the fundamental change of a personality, ‘the emergence of the self’, means an expansion of consciousness. This makes it necessary in the process of ‘Bildung’ to take into consideration extra-rational sources such as symbols and images, in order to broaden the formation of meanings.

It must be emphasised that we do not reach the aims of ‘Bildung’ only through actions, but rather also through unintentional behavior, even to a great extent. In this connection I merely mention the model of Nohl (2006) who describes how the person can arrive through positively experienced spontaneous behaviour at new fundamental schemata and thereby at general aims.

Conclusions

‘Bildung’ as an action is to be understood as the intentional forming of the self. Viewed longitudinally, ‘Bildung’ can be characterised as action that can be located on the highest action level in the frame of the action regulation theory. It is complex, extends over the course of life, its conditional factors are diverse, dynamic and opaque, aims are not defined and are often contradictory. The action of ‘Bildung’ to create a self considered to be valuable was structured longitudinally with the aid of Kegan’s theory of the ontogenesis of the self. Thereby it appears that the process of creating the self is essentially an objectivation process that accordingly goes together with increasing loss of the subject and occurs in stages of increasing complexity. It likewise became clear that the aims of ‘Bildung’ first become more complex with increasing age, for which reason the transformations of the self take longer at each stage. In its complexity, ‘Bildung’ can theoretically only occur with a more advanced position in the life course. Cross-sectionally viewed, ‘Bildung’ comprehends ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ actions. With regard to action regulation theory, ‘bottom-up’ actions generate central aim states from the lower action levels, while ‘top-down’ actions concretise image designs on the lower action levels that are central for action. Overall it becomes clear that ‘Bildung’, in contrast to the unintentional formation of the self, theoretically gains importance with increasing age, which means that the form of education changes in the course of life. (Schneider, 2007, 406): While in the educand’s early years it is primarily the educator who

sets educational aims, as the educand grows older, the educator tries to aid him to achieve her/his self-chosen aims of development.

How does the relevance of the architecture of 'Bildung' reveal itself for practical pedagogy, andragogy and gerontagogy, thus for educational praxis? The educand's 'Bildung' can only be adequately understood from a cross-sectional *and* a longitudinal perspective. To date the cross-sectional perspective has dominated in the relevant literature and textbooks. The action of 'Bildung' is understandable before the background of the theory of the ontogenesis of the self. 'Bildung' is recognisable on a higher level of abstraction, the transformations are perceptible as complex. Since 'Bildung' is to be understood as a life-long action, educational action should be developed to further 'Bildung' over the long run. Educators should be helped to recognise the transformation stage on which the educand finds her/himself and how the specific aims of 'Bildung' can be explored and furthered. If the furthering of 'Bildung' is a cardinal aim of education, pre-school and school curricula, as well as the offerings of andragogy and gerontagogy, are to be examined before the background of self-development.

What research desiderate result from these insights? Overall, a range of studies, among others in the USA, show that the stages are not reached by all people in the corresponding age segments: Not even the majority of adults with formal higher educational degrees achieve a self-determined consciousness. This means adults had not developed abilities for the formation of a self-determined self, which is a very surprising conclusion. From this arises the cardinal research question of how people seeking to improve themselves can be supported over the long run to realise their aims of 'Bildung'. It would likewise be desirable to study how 'Bildung' as action is activated.

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11. THE CARAPACED LEARNER

Lorna Smith

The Carapaced Learner

With the focus returning to learners and their learning it seems apposite to consider the different types of learners that appear before us and the different needs that they have. Through understanding the nature of different learners we can better adapt to ensure that each individual learner is valued and given the right conditions to grow. I have identified three distinct types of learners for whom confidence is a challenge. Often referred to under the generic umbrella term of 'Fragile Learners', I have instead chosen to differentiate between different learner identities and identify particular needs in their learning environment.

The three types of learner identified and expanded below do not comprise a comprehensive taxonomy. Each learner is unique and enters our learning forum from disparate routes. It is merely hoped that by identifying different characteristics common to diverse types of learners their different learning needs can be anticipated and accommodated to better aid their retention, achievement and progression within their educational journey.

The Carapaced Learner

Firstly, we shall consider the Carapaced Learner. A carapace is a protective covering that cannot be separated from the individual. Just as a turtle would no longer be a turtle without its shell so our carapaced learner would not be without their carapace. Their outside world cannot be left at the door of the classroom. Instead, they bring in to their learning environment the issues, concerns and experiences of their lives. Every learner is unique. However, characteristics common to carapaced learners are that they are predominantly mature women returning to education when finding themselves at a crossroads in their life.

Push and pull factors which influence their decision to enter education at this time can include: relationships starting, ending or becoming more stable; children starting nursery, primary school, high school or leaving home; relatives becoming or ceasing to be dependants; partners being supportive or hostile to their learning ambition; realisation that their current employment has no future development, is not providing job satisfaction or is not where they want to stay. This is the time for them to become what they want to be. They remain weighed down by varied external demands on their time with responsibilities often including childcare, the school run, earning income, household duties, peers, partners and dependant extended family members.

Such learners re-enter education with trepidation. They do not expect their current skills and experience to be of value. To engage this learner we need to welcome as much as possible of their active world into the learning environment. In subjects like

developmental psychology a parent's first-hand experience can illuminate theory and research evidence by providing real-life examples of behaviour. In politics, an adult returner will have had the opportunity to vote in local and general elections and can share this experience with younger class members. Carapaced learners may have held positions of responsibility in previous employment. They can have highly developed time management skills learned through running a household and are capable of finely tuning budgets. Statistics and numbers may intimidate them as abstract concepts but with gentle encouragement they soon appreciate that their existing knowledge is both relevant and transferable.

Motivation is central to understanding the Carapaced Learner. It is useful to bear Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs in mind when considering what drives an individual to return to education. Some are driven by a deficiency model: they believe that they never had the opportunity to demonstrate academic ability or achievement at school. They are motivated to prove to themselves and the wider world that, contrary to what they have demonstrated in the past, they are capable of higher academic study. Sometimes this learning opportunity comes only after retirement. This past experience can render them defensive, apologetic or even hostile. They often envy school-leavers who have the opportunity to learn without as many external demands on their time and who, in their opinion, do not fully recognise the value of educational experience on offer to them. They find it difficult to understand a *lack* of motivation in engaging where the traditional young learner has the opportunity to pursue educational goals.

Other learners are motivated by an end goal of a better career. This usually involves short-term hardship in terms of financial and temporal restraints but it is highly motivating in terms of a clear goal. These learners may currently be in unfulfilling occupations, particularly in factories or retail, or have young children at home. They have a desire to provide a better future for their children and this is often tied to becoming a positive role model, particularly in areas with high unemployment.

External and internal motivators are both powerful but those looking to improve themselves on a cognitive level are more resilient to setbacks.

Engagement in learning is a challenge to both the individual learner and their tutor.

There are many conflicting demands on the Carapaced Learner. They fulfil many social roles outside of their formal learning environment and often struggle to juggle conflicting demands. They can lose sight of their role as a learner as competing demands vie for attention. Often, short term family crises supersede a longer term learning goal. There is a strong motivation to succeed which counteracts what is usually a lack of confidence in their abilities. There is often very little support outside of their college environment. Their *learned* identity is at odds with their *learner* identity.

Case Study: Carapaced Learner A

Alice¹ identifies herself through her responsibilities to others. She is a mother, wife and part-time worker. Her sense of self is a reflection of her roles. Her

¹ Case studies retain learner confidentiality. The initials A, B, C etc are used and the pseudonyms simply start with this learner

impetus to return to learning was her eldest child's entry to high school. Her part-time work was not cognitively fulfilling and college hours fitted with high school hours. A return to study would not incur additional childcare costs. She had positive motivations to return to education and was highly motivated to pursue academic study for her own benefit and for the longer-term goal of higher level (and more highly paid) employment. This was her opportunity to be herself and to follow her own personal dreams and ambitions. She wanted to 'see how she got on' with study, identifying herself as 'just a mum and a housewife' and is only tentatively starting to identify herself as a learner now that she is passing basic assessments and progressing with her course.

Alice lacks initial confidence in her abilities. She is tentative about becoming a learner but wants to stretch herself beyond her known world of externally defined roles. She has identified herself through her children, who are a primary focus in her life. Her opportunity to learn could only occur when it would not negatively impact on their day. Her educational journey can only progress with them alongside her.

Case Study: Carapaced Learner B

Brenda was a full-time mother. Her husband was self-employed. When her youngest child started primary school she found that she enjoyed helping her with homework and became increasingly interested in the processes of primary teaching. She had little confidence in her own abilities but entered college as a first step to a long-term goal of becoming a primary teacher. She is now in her third year of a teaching degree and has fully engaged in the learning process. Her identity as a learner is clear and she values her experience in raising her own children. Her 'outside' life has relevance in her current course and provided the catalyst to study. Once she had accepted that she was academically capable of higher level study her family moved into a smaller home to reduce financial and temporal costs while she is at university. Her family and their support are critical to her pursuing her change of career.

Brenda is a mother. Her learning and career goal incorporate this. Her experience of raising her own children enriches her learning and her learning will enrich her child rearing. She brings her experience into the roles she plays. The support of her family is critical to her success as a learner. The family unit has moved to a smaller house to better support her studies and, when Brenda becomes a teacher, they expect to return to a larger house again. The whole family are contributing to her success.

Case Study: Carapaced Learner C

Cathy was injured at work. After two years convalescing she finally had to accept that she could no longer continue her active career in the Emergency Services. Her confidence was low as she had entered her career straight from school and had no formal academic qualifications and no other work experience. Her identity had been closely integrated with her career and she struggled to have a sense of identity without this vocation. She entered college to study Highers²

² Scottish High School qualifications for 17 to 18 year olds, equivalent to English AS level.

with no longer term academic ambition than to see if she could ‘manage’ at that level. She achieved top grades in both examinations that she attempted and, with academic guidance, decided to undertake an HND³ in Social Science. Nearly halfway through this course she is now setting her sights on university and hopes to articulate into Year 3 of a degree programme. She also has expressed the desire to be a lecturer; such is the extent of her new identity within education.

Cathy has struggled to move on from her former work identity. Her work had been her vocation. She had no confidence in taking on a new identity. Although very intelligent and articulate she started her adult educational journey with a course below her abilities however she needed this year to adjust to the change in her life. Her confidence grew on this course and she has now fully engaged with the new identity of learner with a long term view to become an educator.

Case Study: Carapaced Learner D

Donna was in low paid work and had been since she left school. She has three grown-up children. She is an articulate student who enjoyed contributing to discussions. She was thrilled that her own experiences of watching her children grow and develop were not just of interest but could contribute to achieving assessments. Her husband was made redundant during her time on her course and she felt the financial pressure of not contributing to the household bills. This affected her ability to concentrate in class. Her father died suddenly and her mother became dependent upon her to run her household as well as her own. She suffered a nervous breakdown and had to withdraw from the course. She is still interested in learning and now sees herself as a learner and has a clear desire to undertake further study when she is well.

Donna could not leave her family responsibilities at the classroom door. She welcomed the opportunity to share her parental experiences and contributed effectively to classroom discussions. She used her outside life to enrich her formal learning experience. However, her family responsibilities form an integral part of her identity and she cannot separate her college life from her home responsibilities. Her outside life made ever-increasing conflicting demands on her learner identity and all these demands could not be met. She now identifies herself as a learner and, when her outside life allows, will continue her educational journey.

A Carapaced Learner’s active world comprises all their roles and responsibilities. To understand and respond to this type of learner we need to understand and encompass the whole person – carapace and all.

The Chrysalis Learner

Chrysalis learners need to be nurtured within the classroom environment to prepare them for the outside world. They tend to view the classroom as a discrete part of their life and bring little of themselves into this situation. They remain particularly fragile during transition periods both back into education and between levels of courses.

³ Higher National Diploma. A two-year programme equivalent to the first two years of university study.

This type of learner is often male and has experienced a catalyst to enter education. Within Inverclyde, the demise of the shipyards and a lack of highly skilled but highly specific ship-building jobs brought many men back into education. These men had skills that were highly valued within their work environment and had allowed them to provide financially for their families. They need to enter a new arena where they feel no directly transferable skills apply and often believe that they do not speak the right (academic) language. The Social Sciences, where I teach, may not appear at first sight to value the experience of heavy manual labour but these men have valuable life experiences that can illuminate theory and research. It remains difficult to have them share experiences in the classroom as such sharing is stereotyped as being a 'female' trait. It takes a lot of work to have them recognise the value in their experiences of formal and informal groups, social roles, norms, political representation and lobbying, let alone their critical role in modern social history.

Often, the Chrysalis learner leaves their outside life at the door of the classroom and, although fully engaging in the classroom activities, never really identifies themselves as a 'learner' but rather they just happen to be at college *en route* to their real purpose.

Case Study: Chrysalis Learner E

Eddy identifies himself in terms of his past. Finding himself a casualty of the demise of shipbuilding he was bereft of purpose. Having been a skilled, respected worker in his own field he suddenly found that these hard-earned skills no longer had value. He had left school at fifteen to become an apprentice in the shipyards. He had worked for thirty-five years becoming highly skilled within a very narrow field. When asked to describe himself he did so in terms of his former employment. He also felt that his role as father had been diminished with his youngest child leaving home.

He started on an entry-level course (NC⁴ Social Science) as he had an interest in psychology and politics. He had very poor writing skills but an enquiring mind. He was articulate but hesitant to commit ideas to paper. The entry level course allowed Eddy to build his confidence. The focus on interactive group discussions allowed lecturers to tease out value from student contributions and he became more vocal as he realised that his contributions were both valid and valued.

Eddy completed his NC course and progressed into an HNC⁵. He worked exceptionally hard throughout his HNC year and then articulated into the second year of an HND programme. He struggled throughout and put in more hours of study than any other student on his course but he achieved his award. He graduated with the biggest grin in college history but has decided not to continue with education due to the stress he put himself under. He is now working for a voluntary organisation and using his knowledge of people and society. He loves his work and has found a new purpose in his life. He found

⁴ National Certificate

⁵ Higher National Certificate is equivalent to first year university

education very challenging and never fully took on the identity of 'learner' but saw himself as someone who was at college working to prove himself.

Eddy used his formal learning experience to find a new identity. He brought very little of his outside experience into the classroom, compartmentalising it in the past. He felt that he did not fully belong to an academic world although he enjoyed the learning.

Case Study: Chrysalis Learner F

Frank was a former drug user and dealer who was imprisoned for a significant period of time. While in prison he came off drugs and chose to start a new life on his release. He found it very difficult to gain employment and applied to college as a last resort. He is a highly intelligent man who fully appreciated the opportunity to turn his life around. He became a very positive role model to the younger students despite being uncomfortable with any attention. He invested significant amounts of time in unofficially tutoring less academic students. He treated all staff with respect and deference and refused to call us by our first names, instead insisting on 'sir' and 'miss'. He viewed his educational journey as an opportunity he did not deserve. Everyone who taught him felt it was a privilege to do so.

Frank saw learning as a journey away from a past. He made a deliberate effort to separate himself from his previous life. He wanted to use college to gain the necessary qualifications to provide him with a route into a new life and did not want to focus on ties back to a life he no longer wanted to be part of.

Chrysalis learners often find it difficult to identify themselves as learners. They apply themselves fully in assessments but need support, encouragement and recognition that what they are doing is valid and valued. It is interesting to note that although Frank did articulate into a university degree programme he dropped out early on in that course through a combination of perceived lack of academic support and 'people trying to pry into my past'. To understand and support a chrysalis learner it is best to focus on their classroom contributions and written work and to allow them to leave their baggage at the door. Staff need to allow them to exist in the present with a hope for the future that does not need to be anchored in their past.

The Lily-pad Learner

Learners grow and blossom when given roots and provided with an enriching learning experience. These learners can come into education through traditional or non-traditional routes but they share a lack of confidence. These learners tend to engage in learning through discrete and interconnected learning relationships. Such learning relationships arise when we learn from or through others, or when others affect our attitude to learning or affect our identity as a learner. Although the lecturer is the most obvious learning relationship the informal peer relationships can help or hinder retention of students and their engagement in the learning environment.

The Lily-pad Learner needs to feel secure in the classroom environment. They need to feel valued however they are likely to be hesitant at first. Sometimes, a lack of confidence can be expressed in reaction through outbursts or derogatory comments aimed towards others. Through time and perseverance this learner will allow themselves to be vulnerable through expressing opinions and beliefs and offering insights. They will also become happier to engage in formative assessments and receive feedback on their work. Non-submission of work cannot be condemned until we understand the learner. Are they afraid that their work is too poor, that everyone but them understands what they have to do or that they fear they are the only learner in the class to face a possible rejection of their work? This resistance to facing up to possible short-term failure in order to achieve long-term goals is difficult to overcome and taxes patience. Perseverance pays off, however, as this type of learner blossoms in the course of their studies. The budding learner blossoms into a confident learner that seeks to progress to university and gain a degree. One of the most rewarding aspects of investing significant time and effort into Lily-pad Learners is that they never forget where their confidence grew.

Case Study: Lily-pad Learner G

Gordon came from a second-generation unemployed family. He had no intention of entering employment and his only motivation to re-enter education was a government initiative that threatened to stop welfare state benefit payments to those not actively seeking work or in education or training. He started his adult educational journey on the shortest course available to him – a six-month introduction to Social Sciences. This young man was resistant to becoming a ‘learner’. He was highly vocal about being at college only until he could be sure that his ‘benefits’ would not be stopped. He was dismissive about his peers’ ambitions and insulting towards those intending further study. At first, he refused to engage in classroom discussion. He submitted assessments at the minimum required levels to pass. Over the duration of this initial course Gordon softened in his attitude towards learning. By coincidence, we used the same public transport system to and from college and I took the opportunity to chat informally about social sciences with him. He grudgingly admitted that he ‘quite liked politics’ but wouldn’t consider further study because he just wanted to sign on again. By the end of the short course he conceded to signing up for just one more year and produced exceptional work throughout his HNC course. Academic guidance throughout the year encouraged him to commit to a further year to gain his HND qualification, which he did with merit passes. He put in a late application to university and had to admit to himself that he loved learning and had found a new vocation. This young man who was initially hostile to the idea of study graduated with a PhD in Philosophy from one of the UK’s top academic universities. He had grown into a confident, articulate and motivated individual who embraced learning and had a thirst for personal development. He kept in touch for a number of years as he extended his studies through various international institutions. He always remembered the first step on his journey.

Gordon was a significant learner success. His educational journey started from reluctant beginnings. Once the roots for learning were put down they took hold

and his learner identity developed and grew in ways that he had not imagined. He changed slowly, taking just one step at a time. Each step strengthened his learner identity and a firm foundation was built and developed upon.

Case Study: Lily-pad Learner H

Hannah had a chaotic home life. She has two young children and has experienced domestic abuse. To escape, she moved to a new town where she knew no-one and had no network of friends or family for support. The college was important to her initially as nursery provision was available and it ‘got me out of the house’. Very early on in her course she volunteered to take on the role of Class Representative. She became very opinionated and quick to offer advice to others whether solicited or not. This led to tension within the class. Gradually, several of the young mothers, including Hannah, coalesced into an informal study group. They took turns looking after each other’s children allowing the others to study uninterrupted. Lasting friendships developed and all the students in this group benefitted from an increase in quality study time and a lessening of the burden of lone parenting. As a group, they progressed to further study and maintained their friendship throughout their learning journey. Without the support these new horizontal learning relationships offered Hannah would not have continued with her studies.

Hannah was a vulnerable woman who did not want to appear as if she needed help. The support network that became woven around her allowed her to grow as an individual as well as a learner. Her potential had been constrained by her home circumstances. By removing herself from this negative environment into a healthy environment she met the right conditions for growth. Although the vertical learning relationships of academic staff were important the horizontal relationships with her fellow students were of more immediate and lasting value on her educational journey as they became the mechanism to support her learner identity.

These learners need sustained support and the availability of emotional as well as academic guidance. Student services can offer certain counselling services but the support of fellow students can often be of at least equal and often more value. Perseverance is central to success with a Lily-pad learner. Just as plants can take a while to generate enough impetus to blossom so too can our learners.

Working with Learners

For all learners it is important to recognise the value that an individual’s lived life can bring to their learning environment. It is critical to engage learners in the learning process through a motivating environment, and equally important to recognise that motivators vary. Research can benefit from having a clear focus on exploring the individual’s lived experience. [Paul Flowers, 1997] Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) can be applied to study individual learning journeys⁶. It is a method that focuses on an individual or small group of

⁶ Gallacher, J., Mayes, T., Crossan, B., Cleary, P., Smith, L. and Watson, D. (2005) “Understanding and Enhancing Learning in Community- Based Further Education”

individuals and aims to listen to the learner's voice. Through intensive analysis, interpretation and reflection the researcher can understand the lived experience of learners.

Engaging Learners

In November 2008, our campus held a mock US election to engage students from all our levels of courses. Each class had a specific role to play. Different class groups took on such diverse but interrelated roles as presidential candidate, running mate, campaign manager, speech writer, policy researcher, political advisor, opinion pollster, returning officer and fundraiser (for a local charity – not the candidates!). The presidential candidates engaged in a head-to-head debate over policies before campus-wide voting took place.

This event allowed students to pursue soft and hard indicators of achievement. Learning Outcomes were realised in Communications, Research Skills, Working with Others, Skills for Work and Research Methods in Psychology. Students also learned first hand about the value of campaigning and interpersonal communication. They learned vicariously about engaging voters and the importance of talking to the electorate. Each class was challenged and stretched with all members benefitting. Retention figures improved with students commenting on increased motivation to attend. Peer relationships were strengthened with class members strongly identifying with their class.

Soft indicators include confidence, motivation to learn, pride in achievement, internalising the value of research, interpersonal skills, respect for others, citizenship, engagement with the local community and a strong sense of identity with the college. Listening skills, negotiating with peers and persuasive communications were also developed. Most apparent were a sense of pride in achievement, team spirit and sense of identity with the campus. The different roles allowed engagement across all levels. All types of learners adopted a role according to their abilities and aspirations with the whole election process providing an enriched learning experience. Staff became just as reinvigorated and engaged with the process as the student learners and it was a universally positive experience.

It is worth noting that although the Democrat candidate held and maintained an early lead in the polls (as surveyed by one class as part of their research methods assessment) the results were exceptionally close. Only ten votes separated the two candidates, with the Republican candidate pipping the Democrat at the post. The early lead of their opponents had identified a clear need for more personal campaigning and ground level persuasion. Of most value is the reflection of the winning candidate that he had considered leaving the course until the election but now wanted to stay and study. At the Inauguration Ceremony in January the President-elect and runner-up were sworn in as campus president and vice-president. The campus now has student forums up and running to more fully engage learners with the management of the campus as well as their learning, and there are more fundraising events planned. Seeds have been sown and the momentum must be maintained to benefit all members of this learning community.

Initial Conclusions

A classification system will never encompass all possible learners. This paper suggests an initial taxonomy to identify different kinds of learners who present with different types of needs. Issues are particularly noticeable with a mature student's immediate return to education. This signifies a significant change in their life and a deliberate step (or giant leap!) in their educational journey. Their identity changes to encompass 'learner' although many cite learning experiences anecdotally in initial interview and in class. They have different reasons to engage or resist engagement in learning.

The increased role of peer support (horizontal learning) is of interest along with identifying the fragile nature of these learners and identifying specific keys for engagement in the classroom community. It is the hope of this researcher to understand how better to differentiate types of learners and anticipate their needs that all may have the opportunity to learn to their full benefit.

12. RECOGNITION OF LIFESPAN LEARNING FROM A PERMANENT EDUCATION PERSPECTIVE

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Permanent Education: a historical and conceptual approach

Permanent Education or Lifelong Education –see Rubenson (2004)– was born in the age of Enlightenment. Concepts are born and defined within historical, social and/or cultural landscapes, and this is very clear in the case of Permanent Education. Enlightenment was a political and cultural movement seeking –between other things– for education and democracy. One example of this can be Jovellanos (Lerena, 1983) –the most important Enlightenment representative in Spain. Jovellanos considered that education was the main principle of the wealth of the nations and, he added, despotism was based on ignorance.

The most important event concerning Permanent Education during the Enlightenment age was the Condorcet Report presented to the French Assembly in 1791, two years after the French Revolution. The following quote shows the spirit of those times:

“We have observed, finally, that instruction should not abandon individuals at the moment they leave school; it should cover all ages [...] this second instruction is as more important as narrower have been the limits that infancy instruction closed [...] the possibility to receive a first instruction is not as [important] as [the possibility] to keep its advantages (Condorcet, in Tiana, 1991, p. 11).”

Three different issues arise in this sentence: i) it expands education in the lifespan; ii) it guarantees an elementary education for all; and iii) it assures the compromise to keep education – and resources, of course – during the whole life. This humanistic approach is strengthened by the inclusion of another element: universality. “Therefore, instruction must be universal, that is to say, extend to all citizens” (Condorcet, in González & Madrid, 1988, p. 90).

The XIX century is full of educative struggles in two different ways: i) rising working class effort to expand – sometimes from the beginning of it –their elementary and further education; ii) a strong attempt from the upper class–

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landlords and the rising industrial bourgeoisie –to resist these pressures and limit education for all. The consequence of these struggles was the birth of public school and compulsory education in the developed countries, in the XX century. Yet, in the XXI century, and according to UNESCO (2001), there are about 1 billion non-literate adults in the world.

As we know now, the idea of Permanent Education is drawn after The Second World War. Lengrand –in one of the most impressive sentences about education– stated:

“The only fruitful thing that an educator can do for another man, and concretely for an adult, consists in facilitating him/her the instruments and put him/her in situations in which he/she can, through the elements of his/her own condition, through his/her daily experiences, from his/her struggles, from his/her successes and failures, construct a personal knowledge and reflection, and with a progressive effort to take possession of one’s own personality elements, occupying its dimensions and giving them a form and an expression (Lengrand, 1973, p. 20).”

The *new* Permanent Education idea was born in a new Enlightenment spirit growing after the most horrific period in whole human history. There was a generalised belief that education could contribute to avoid new barbarities such as wars, rising nuclear powers, attempts to eliminate entire populations, etc... In 1948 UNESCO was created. One of the first General Managers, Rene Maheu, said:

“Permanent Education is an idea that was born among Adult Education specialists and facilitators; in other words, it was born in contexts outside of the traditional school and university system; and it was also born more from the contact with the social and economic reality of real life than from the contact with the academic universe (Maheu, in Fullat, 1973, p. 15).”

UNESCO has become one of the most important International Organisations working in the education field. In the Conference of Nairobi (Kenya) in 1976, UNESCO defined Permanent Education as follows:

The *permanent education* expression designates a global project aiming to restructure the existing educational system, and the development of all training possibilities outside of the educational system,

- In that project, [the individual] is the agent of his/her own education, through permanent interaction between his/her actions and his/her reflection,
- Permanent education, far from being limited to the schooling period, must cover all life dimensions, all knowledge branches and all the practical knowledge that can be acquired in any context and contribute to all forms of personality development,
- The educational processes, which occur throughout children’s, young people’s and adults’ life, in whichever form they take, must be considered as a whole (UNESCO, 1977, p. 124).

Permanent Education means, for us, changing the mind about education; not only about adult education, but also about the whole educational system in its formal, non-formal and informal expressions:

“If learning is a lifelong subject, in all its length and diversity, in what concerns its educational resources as well as its social and economical resources, then it’s necessary to go further than the educational systems’ review (Faure et al, 1986, p. 40).”

In short, we consider that Permanent Education means:

- To think about education and adult education from other perspectives.
- Step by step, all educational processes must be equally integrated, as a totality.
- Each life stage has its own worries and necessities. Education must be adapted to these different stages.
- Places and phases of learning can be different. The individual must be able to choose the best moment to learn.
- Learning in school and learning out of school must not be contradictory.

It is over these points, but overall over the last point, that we can develop our concept of recognition.

The most important issue linking Permanent Education and Recognition and Validation of non-formal and informal learning is that the latter is related to the learning processes developed through the lifespan; hence recognition of it can be considered a “step” in the path of Permanent Education. On the other hand, we shall set up a marked difference between Permanent Education and Lifelong Learning. In the Lifelong Learning perspective, Recognition and Validation of previously developed competences is only a time-restricted happening related to obtaining a degree, allegedly (or expectedly) in order to open labour market doors. In the Permanent Education scheme, recognition is one, among other steps, of a continuous educative path of a singular and unique person.

Recognition of prior knowledge through Permanent Education lenses (the Portuguese experience)

The phenomena that originated the development of Permanent Education (Kirpal, 1979) are the same that condition the emergence of functionalist and adaptive frameworks (and consequent practices) in Portuguese adult education nowadays, under the influence of lifelong learning perspectives:

- a) the core and inescapable importance of knowledge¹, and the continuous *information overload* that individuals are subject to these days, contributes to the non-critical, compulsive, or even compulsory participation in adult education and training options that are not always adequate or significant, but are available in the education *souk* and are attractively marketed;

¹ The Lisbon Strategy and its benchmarks impose the *duty* to constantly learn, to be relentlessly involved in, and aware of the learning processes: it is reasonable to ask if it is a “lifelong learning” or a “life *along* learning” paradigm.

- b) the expansion of education and training opportunities has not yet guaranteed equal access for all²; it has perversely inspired competition and commercialisation of educational options³; and it has been put at the service of *domestication* goals: adult education has withdrawn from its relationship to social policies and transformed itself into a speech of competition and employability (Lima, 2004, p. 16);
- c) between the historical traditions of humanist adult education (*cf.* Melo, Lima & Almeida, 2002) and the individualist needs of the consumerist knowledge societies (e.g. Lipovetsky, 1989), “lifelong learning tends to despise the emancipatory and transforming potential assumed since the years 60/70 by a lot of permanent education projects” (Lima, *op. cit.*, p. 23).

The Permanent Education approach retrieves the *ecological*, participative, grass-rooted and empowering construction of knowledge, and therefore reclaims the critical relationship between the individual and the collective forces that shape one’s existence, the communitarian strengths and energies that build the spaces for active citizenship, which in turn lay “the foundations of social cohesion and trust ... thus providing the setting where sustainable development becomes possible and mature communities can blossom” (Carneiro, 2002, p. 304). It also provides the possibility for the construction of “claimed spaces” (Jones & Gaventa, 2002), where people can effectively contribute to the development of their quality of life, deciding and intervening on significant individual and collective issues and activities, i.e. refusing to maintain the educational “provided spaces” (*ibid.*) that, in the hands of the already powerful (state and private organisations that decide on what is best for the populations), contribute to the perpetuation of social inequalities and power relations.

1. Recognition

The V International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA, Hamburg, 1997) determined that recognition and validation of prior knowledge and competences developed in formal and informal contexts throughout the lifespan should be systematically developed and constituted as an organised and coherent process, which would allow the mobilisation of practical and previous learning, and could inclusively serve as a means to unblock adults’ resistance to education and training processes (namely in the low-qualified populations and those at risk of exclusion). It also stated that “[a]ll members of the community should be invited and, where necessary, assisted in participating in adult learning. This implies meeting a diversity of learning needs.” (Agenda for the Future, number 43)⁴.

² In the year 2004, 9% of the Portuguese population was illiterate (Census 2001). In 2005 the IALS (OECD, Eurostat, and UNESCO) demonstrated that Portuguese adults were at the bottom of the literacy development scale. In 2005 (Eurostat) one survey on the “information societies” revealed that 54% of the Portuguese population were computer illiterate, one of the highest rates in Europe.

³ In Portugal, the state is increasingly withdrawing from its financial responsibilities towards schools and higher education. In order to survive, universities transform themselves into educational markets: raising fees, selling knowledge and convening with private bank institutions (in exchange for publicity and commerce within the school’s physical place).

⁴ Available at <http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/confintea/agendeng.htm>

The historical and demographical idiosyncrasies of the Portuguese context and population (described above) lead us to believe that despite the lack of formal qualifications and the low literacy rates, these adults have nevertheless learnt, but through non-formal and informal processes (Lima, 2007) –therefore, the development of a recognition, validation and certification system was seen as an instrument to “reduce the educational and vocational deficit and contribute to the elimination of under-certification through the reinforcement of lifelong education and training, with a sense of inter-generational solidarity”⁵. It was then “a new service which conceptualization, organization and implementation”, was under the responsibility of the *National Agency of Adult Education and Training (ANEFA)*⁶.

2. Validation

ANEFA was “conceived as a structure of mediation, and in some cases, maybe of regulation” (Melo *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 118). Under special financing conditions⁷ this Agency was the first for responsibility for the development of the *Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC)* system, the creation of the first *Adult Education and Training (AET)* courses, and the edification of the first *RVCC Centres’* network. The global aim of this system was to give opportunity to the “Portuguese adult population, especially the less qualified, to exert an active citizenship and contribute to [the process of making] Portugal a more competitive country, with more education, more training, better employment and quality of life” (Canelas, 2002, p. 6).

The birth of this system occurred outside of the academic and formal education fields, *incubated* in grass-root organizations: initially assumed as a matter of “social justice” (*ibid.*, p. 11), *RVCC* and *AET* courses were developed by non-governmental organizations like local development associations, private organisations aiming at social inclusion, voluntary institutions, etc. –which was considered to be a surplus value in these devices, given “the nature of the institutions involved (...) not only for the means they can offer but also for the knowledge they detain about the communities in which they’re in and for the practical experience in psychosocial support they possess” (*ibid.*, p. 21).

The first pedagogical teams were organised in national, regional and local groups, who observed, discussed and analysed the development of the programmes by each institution. The first report on *AET* courses revealed that the local level of organisation was the most significant and successful, due to its “friendly critic” approach and the effort to develop reflexive practices among the teams (*ibid.*, p. 39).

The *RVCC* process was based on a *life history analysis*, through the construction of a *Reflexive Learning Portfolio (PRA)*⁸, and organised around a *Key-Competences Framework*, which allowed access to the implicit knowledge, competencies, latent learning and experiences. On the other hand, it created

⁵ *Despacho conjunto n.º. 262/2001, de 22 de Março, Artigo 2.º, ponto 1, p. 5104*

⁶ (*ibid.*)

⁷ At the time, large amounts of money from the European Social Fund were being invested in education.

⁸ Initially called *Personal and Vocational Dossier*, it is now called *PRA*.

opportunities for the reconstruction of personal meanings attributed to learning and experience (retrospectively), and also to project and reformulate personal and vocational ventures (CIDEDEC, 2004)– *i.e.* including the lifelong dimension of individual existence and learning, the recognition of non-intentional and intentional learning, and the orientation towards personal and social dimensions⁹.

In *AET courses* the *RVC*¹⁰ process was the first step into locally and individually-centred training curricula, in which communitarian dimensions were evidenced mainly through the development of collective activities during the training period, which included local partnerships, resources and population. One other important feature of *RVC(C)*, as referred by the participants, was the centrality of “individual sessions in which the subject, free from the pressure of being heard by people who know [him/her], can express [himself/herself] more freely” (Canelas, *op. cit.*, p. 28).

3. Certification

From the year 2002 until the year 2006, all ANEFA’s duties were transferred to the *Directorate-General of Vocational Training (DGFV)*. Then, in October that year, a new structure is created –the *National Agency for Qualification (ANQ)*– which will function under “indirect supervision” of the state, and underneath joint custody of the Portuguese *Ministry of Education* and *Ministry of Work and Social Solidarity*. ANQ will from then on and up to this moment, “coordinate the execution of youth and adult education and vocational training policies and ensure the development and management of the [RVCC] system”¹¹.

Along with the birth of this new structure, a new (and massive) qualification programme was also launched in Portugal: the *New Opportunities Programme*. This programme aims at qualifying 1 million Portuguese people until 2010 and follows the Lisbon Strategy directives and benchmarks, it is coined by the slogan “learning compensates”, and it has now:

- a) reinforced the national *RVCC* network by creating hundreds of new *Centres*¹², mainly within schools (while closing a great number of those “non-governmental” centres previously responsible for the system development). Clearly adopting a *remedial* perspective of adult education provision, these *Centres’* activities are now:

directed towards adults without qualification or holding an inadequate or insufficient qualification in view of the individual and the labour market needs, ensuring [their] guidance to the most adequate [qualification option] and, when justified, (...) [developing *RVCC*] processes (...) that can be completed through training actions of variable duration, in view of the diagnosed needs¹³.

⁹ The three components of Permanent Education (*cf.* UNESCO, *op. cit.*)

¹⁰ *RVCC* is the term used for the complete process, when the adult obtains a certain level of academic or vocational certification. *RVC* refers to the process that allows validation of certain competency units, which, in the case of *AET courses*, provided an individual positioning in the *Key-Competences Framework* which allowed the construction of learner-centred curricula.

¹¹ *Decreto-Lei n.º. 213/2006, de 27 de Outubro*, p. 7530

¹² Previously called *RVCC Centres* and now called *New Opportunities Centres*, there are nearly 500 in the country.

¹³ *Portaria n.º 370/2008 de 21 de Maio*, p. 2898.

- b) registered about 500 thousand Portuguese people in the centres, which has led to the necessity of the current massive training programme for the “new” pedagogical teams who are to be involved in the national qualification process (mainly constituted by teachers), by convening with universities and other higher education institutions –adult education is increasingly controlled by the state, the *New Opportunities* programme and the formal education settings and actors. The substitution of adult educators by regular teachers has several meanings. It means primarily the disruption of the balance that should exist between formal learning and learning outside schools, so dear to permanent education. It means also the subversion of the theoretical and methodological principles of permanent education: in order to act according to them, teachers need to undergo a process of paradigmatic rupture (Fragoso, 2007), or else they will be forwarding the educational practices they are used to.
- c) state control becomes visible in the quantitative demands imposed on the *Centres*: there are numbers of certifications to be done annually or financial cuts will be carried out, endangering the teams’ jobs. On the other hand, the *New Opportunities Programme* is now conceptualised as a big doorway to all the educational offers to adults. It is after the diagnosis made in the centres that the adults are «sent», not only to the recognition processes, but also to the remaining learning and training courses. These features make us believe that there is an instrumentalisation of adult education and adult educators, that perform their tasks to meet government goals –that can or cannot be according to the needs of people.
- d) enlarged the possibility of certification into the secondary level and developed the vocational *RVCC* process. It has nevertheless become more centred in the certification dimension: it is conducted through “several steps, which are initiated by adults’ welcoming and diagnosis, through which, based in their life experience and their motivations and expectations”, guidance toward available qualification training options can be made¹⁴. *RVCC* has now turned life into an asset, as it comprises the free knowledge capital acquired by adults in their everyday lives. The backbone of validation and certification processes should be life history approaches. Prior learning is embedded in the experiences that learners bring to certification and validation process. There is a wide range of instruments to evoke past and present experiences: oral history, family stories, photographs and other personal artefacts, interviews, diaries, auto/biographical writing, letters and electronic communication, etc. (González Monteagudo & Fragoso, 2008). But the pressures put forth to the centre’s team’s lead to the abandoning of such time-consuming activities, transforming validation and certification into an end by itself – not a process.

The plurality of educational institutions which characterizes Permanent Education (Apps, 1985) has been gradually lost, as the *RVCC Centres* became to be massively promoted by formal education spaces. The process does not include all of life dimensions (Marín Ibáñez, 1984) anymore (there is no time:

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2899.

as the goal-oriented strategies from the *New Opportunities* programme pressure the teams, the process is now organized in collective sessions and shortened in length; or space: from the locally-rooted informal spaces to the school buildings), but only those defined by the *Key-Competences Framework*. At the European level, the Action Plan on Adult Learning (European Commission, 2007) commits to the need to “accelerate the process of recognition and validation”¹⁸.

The central role of groups and communities in the learning process (particularly in informal and non-formal contexts), from a Permanent Education perspective, inevitably demands their active participation in shaping, implementing and evaluating their educational opportunities, as opposed to the compulsive and generalised centralisation of the adult education and training administration that we have been witnessing during the past years in Portugal. Lima (1994) has long ago suggested *regionalization* of adult education as a way to overcome the “experimentalism” of educational reforms in Portugal, and as a means to overpower the bureaucratized and centralised instances that

“control and legislate about something as local as education, advocating that nothing can substitute the education of the people, in all of its dimensions (...) capable of turning [it] into an active subject of its development process and to critically and creatively resist to the condition of [being an] object of an exogenous, rationalist and technocratic process of modernization (p. 16).”

It is now time to give people back what is theirs, accepting that solidarity, one of the most important values in the *uncertainty era* –and central pillar of social cohesion– can only be enhanced through adult education from a humanist perspective, on which the Permanent Education lenses are *calibrated*, rather than from an utilitarian perspective on the adults’ learning assets in the knowledge economies.

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¹⁸ For more information, see: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0558:FIN:PT:PDF>

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13. “FOLLOW THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD”: EXPLORERS AND TOURISTS ON THE JOURNEY TO TEACHING QUALIFICATIONS IN FURTHER EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

Michael Tedder and Robert Lawy

Introduction

This chapter was prompted by research into the changing requirements of programmes designed to lead to professional qualifications for people who wish to teach in post-compulsory education in the UK, in further education colleges (FE) and in the wider ‘learning and skills sector’¹. For more than 20 years, there have been attempts to create structured and formalised programmes of initial training for teachers in further education colleges based on statements of ‘standards’. This trend was apparent in the articulation of the FE National Training Organisation standards (FENTO 1999) and in a more recent set of standards produced by Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK 2007a, 2007b). These statements represent an approach to training based on an assumption that the learning journey of each new trainee teacher can be signposted and thereby regulated if standards are in place. While there is an argument that some regulation of the sector was overdue (DfES 2004, 2006) and wide agreement that new entrants should be accorded a mandatory right to appropriate training, there is disquiet among many teacher educators about the form that regulation has now taken. The new regime, initiated in September 2007, requires ‘trainees’ to address a ‘minimum core’ of literacy, numeracy and IT; they are directed to a targeted subject training or pedagogy under the direction of ‘mentors’; programmes use devices such as individual learning plans (ILPs) to articulate ‘SMART’ targets (i.e. goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-constrained); all programmes need to be geared to the officially sanctioned statements of national standards.

What if we conceptualise the process of achieving an FE teaching qualification as a learning journey? The metaphor has become widely used in the UK and is particularly popular in the learning and skills sector. Arguably this is traceable to the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) that, in 2002 encouraged discourse around the theme in several ways: through a special issue of the periodical ‘Learning and Skills Research’ (LSDA 2002), through a significant research report ‘*Learning journeys: learners’ voices*’ (Ward and Edwards 2002) and

¹ Further education colleges are the most substantial component of the further education (FE) sector in the UK. Also termed the ‘learning and skills sector’ or the ‘lifelong learning sector’, it embraces adult and community learning (ACL), work-based learning (WBL) and the voluntary training sector. Practitioners who undertake courses leading to teaching qualifications include teachers from these fields as well as teachers or trainers in prisons, hospitals, the armed forces and other public services.

through the annual conference at Warwick University in December 2002 when the theme was 'Learners' journeys: the role of research'. The research and scholarship undertaken at that time have helped to create metaphors and language with which we continue to explore ideas of learning for adults, even though the life journeys of some organisations, such as the LSDA, have been terminated.

The research that informs this paper used a life history methodology to inquire into the operation and meaning of recent changes in FE teacher training both for 'trainees' and for their 'trainers' (whether as course tutors or as organisation managers) in the south west region of England. What we found was that the experiences of the trainees who participated in the research defied neat categorisation. An assumption of the instrumentalism that underpins much of the official discourse relating to teacher training is that there is a common outcome or a set of common outcomes that can be achieved; moreover, that the purpose of any programme of teacher training should be orientated to those ends (Gibson 1986). There is an implicit assumption that erstwhile teachers share a set of assumptions and even experiences and that the responsibility of those involved in teacher training is to fashion these assumptions and identifications into compliance with agreed and defined outcomes.

In keeping with the journey metaphor, however, we heard trainees telling stories about their career trajectory in which they did not cede control of their experiences and understandings. Rather, they were always and necessarily keen to assert control over their construction of meaning. Trainee teachers routinely interpreted their training experiences in a multiplicity of ways that reflected their life experience and dispositions. While there were some outcomes that were shared with others, all of the trainees individualised their understandings in distinctive ways. Using the journey metaphor, the trainees were more like explorers or travellers using their resources to undertake a journey into the unknown, rather than tourists following a well-trodden path towards a pre-specified destination.

To show some of the variety of understanding, this chapter focuses mainly on data obtained from trainees we interviewed. There are related papers that focus on other key themes of the research, including the achievement of agency among course tutors (Lawy and Tedder 2009) and into perceptions about mentoring (Tedder and Lawy 2009).

Context

Changing regulations for the reform of the further education workforce in England in 2004 were set out by the government in its document *Equipping our teachers for the future: reforming initial teacher training for the learning and skills sector* (DfES 2004). For the first time there was to be a mandatory requirement of staff to have a teaching qualification with the introduction of a licentiate qualification for initial training - Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) - while Associate Teacher Learning and Skills (ATLS) status would be available for those 'with teaching roles (that) carry significantly less than the full range of teaching responsibilities' (DIUS 2007). Those with small-scale or occasional roles would be exempt from 'full teacher training' but all other

'part-time, full-time and fractional teachers' would have five years in which to complete the training. It was envisaged that training for QTLS or ATLS awards would comprise elements that include: initial assessment; accreditation of prior learning; skills support; mentoring; blended learning; observation; a progress log; and registration with the Institute for Learning (DfES 2004, p.8).

The White Paper, *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* (DfES 2006) outlined how the new licentiate qualification arrangements would work and detailed guidance followed (DIUS 2007). This led to the introduction of a raft of new teacher qualifications (PTLLS, CTLLS and DTLLS²) that were designed to meet the various professional needs of those in different teaching or training situations throughout the learning and skills sector. The new qualifications replaced older established awards offered by examining bodies such as City & Guilds (C&G) and EdExcel. In order to meet the new requirements, higher education institutions that were offering qualifications for further education teachers, such as a Certificate in Education (Cert Ed) or Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), found it necessary to review how the new awards should articulate with their qualifications.

At the centre of the reforms is Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) which, as a 'sector skills council', has the responsibility for publishing current statements about the 'standards' to be achieved by further education teachers while responsibility for quality assurance was delegated to another body, Standards Verification UK (SVUK). The standards are expected to underpin any programme leading to one of the officially sanctioned awards. Another significant body involved in quality assurance is the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) that produced a series of reports (such as Ofsted 2003, 2006) drawing attention to the variability in standards of provision for initial teacher training for teachers in the learning and skills sector. Ofsted is well-established as the body responsible for the inspection of schools and colleges and their remit has encompassed inspection of school teacher training for many years. However, their responsibility for inspecting teacher training in the learning and skills sector is recent.

Mention needs to be made also of the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) that had a responsibility for advising and supporting colleges and awarding bodies in their implementation of the new regulations. One initiative to further this goal was the identification throughout the English regions of a series of Centres of Excellence in Teacher Training (CETTs). In 2007, a CETT in the South West of England (SWitch) invited its members to submit proposals for projects related to the changing regulations. The authors expressed interest in a project to research the perceptions of trainees, course tutors and managers in various learning and skills contexts about the process of producing and implementing Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and about experiences of mentoring. These were innovations that were in the process of being implemented into the University of Exeter teacher training programme, and so the research was of direct relevance to teacher trainers associated with the programme.

² 'Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector Award' (PTLLS Award); 'Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector' (CTLLS); 'Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector' (DTLLS).

The Project

A series of research questions was formulated for the project that served the purpose of integrating our interests in ILPs and mentoring within a practicable research project. The principal data collection method comprised semi-structured interviews and twenty-eight interviews were undertaken in the first three months of 2008. The interviews lasted anywhere between 45 minutes and two hours and enabled the research team to collect rich qualitative data from ten trainees, from nine teacher educators who fulfil roles as tutors and/or mentors in programmes and also from nine managers, some working in FE colleges and some in other types of organisation (See Table 1).

	Managers	Tutors	Trainees
FE Colleges	5	7	7
LEA Adult Education	2	2	
Voluntary	1		1
Private sector	1		2
TOTAL	9	9	10

Table 1: Respondents' institutions

We managed to secure interviews with trainees from a wide range of programmes in our project (See Table 2). It is important to emphasise that the selection was not designed to be statistically significant: other research teams worked with quantitative data (see Pye et al., 2008) and our purpose was to secure 'depth' of information within different contexts rather than statistically representative data.

	Trainees
PTLLS	3
CTLLS	2
DTLLS	1
Cert Ed (non-Exeter)	1
PGCE (PCE) part-time (Exeter)	1
PGCE (PCE) full-time (Exeter)	2
TOTAL	10

Table 2: Trainees' programmes

All the interviews were transcribed and subjected to different analytical approaches: summaries of each interview were written by the interviewer and shared with colleagues. Team meetings identified themes and issues that were emerging from the research. Transcripts and summaries were incorporated with other data into an NVivo project that enabled further forms of analytical interrogation. Interpretation of the data evolved during the spring and summer of

2008 through presentations of interim findings to members of college teacher training teams and to meetings organised by SWitch.

The ethical codes of the university and of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) were observed so that participants were suitably briefed about the purposes of the research and about the use of the material they provided and gave their consent voluntarily for its subsequent use (BERA 1992, 2004). The identity of the participants has been protected by the use of pseudonyms in written accounts of the project using interview data and the confidentiality of what they said has been respected.

Theoretical Framing

A research project in this field interested the authors for several reasons. One was that the School of Education at Exeter has in the past had a substantial commitment to the initial education and continuing professional development for teachers in further and adult education. Another is the tradition of critical empirical research that members of the School have undertaken in further education for many years (see, for example, Bloomer 1997; Bloomer and Hodkinson 1999; James and Biesta 2007; Quinn et al. 2008). That tradition can be characterised as critical and ethnographic, using methods that are qualitative and interpretative. The project we proposed falls within that tradition: it was ethnographic in that we wanted to collect data that would enable us to secure the respective perceptions of trainees, of tutors and mentors, and of the managers within a range of different learning and skills providers. It was qualitative in that our preferred method of data collection were semi-structured interviews that would afford us insights into people's experiences of the systems and structures that are being used by learning and skills providers. Such an approach would enable our participants to go beyond answering narrowly technical questions about planning or about mentoring practices to convey something of what such experiences meant for them personally and in their professional development.

The project methodology was informed by a life history approach to the collection and interpretation of data (Alheit and Dausien 2002; Biesta et al. 2008; Elliott 2005; Goodson 2001; Tedder 2007; Tedder and Biesta 2007; West et al. 2005). We wanted to collect data in interviews that invited participants to tell stories about their professional lives. Such data would enable us to construct stories of practice that could be located within the personal and social dimensions of our interviewees' life stories. We anticipated that this would open possibilities for exploring the significance of learning about ILPs and about mentors and mentor training within our participants' professional formation. We were interested in the prospects for exploring the development of professional practice through biographical learning.

Peter Alheit (2005) is an established life history researcher who has taken particular interest in the forms of learning that it enables. He defines biographical learning as:

“a self-willed, ‘autopoietic’ accomplishment on the part of active subjects, in which they reflexively ‘organise’ their experience in such a

way that they also generate personal coherence, identity, a meaning to their life history and a communicable, socially viable lifeworld perspective for guiding their actions (Alheit, 2005, p. 209).”

Part of the significance of this statement lies in its aspiration to bridge the personal and the social domains. On the one hand it acknowledges the social situatedness of personal practices but it emphasises also for each individual the relationship between reflection, identity and personal agency.

Bron has drawn attention to the shaping of identities that occurs through life transitions such as emigration and career changes when “a new culture, a new language, and symbols as well ‘as meanings are involved, enrich and shape our lives again and again’ (Bron 2005, p. 218). Bron draws attention to the value of stories in supporting such learning within a social and cultural context:

“The stories people tell are temporal products showing that the individual life is never ending and always open to new experiences, negotiations and changes, often unexpected, as are identities and social roles. This makes each life unique and dynamic, and yet within the same culture and language so similar, that it enables us to understand each other, and to change others and ourselves. (Bron 2005, p. 219)”.

There has been a strong rise in the use of biographical and life history approaches to research in adult learning in recent decades. The ‘turn to biographical methods’ (West et al. 2007; see also Rustin 2000) can partly be understood ‘as a reaction against those traditional forms of research, which marginalized the perspectives of subjects themselves or reduced social processes, including learning, to overly abstract entities or largely socially determined processes in which individuals had little space for creativity’ (ibid.). Such research, so West et al., claim ‘gave little or no credence to the idea that participants might shape, however contingently, the social and educational worlds they inhabited and might have important stories to tell in building a better, more nuanced understanding of learning and educational processes’ (ibid.). Our research project was founded on the assumption that educational practitioners (the tutors and managers) comprise members of a community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) who were actively engaged in supporting aspirant practitioners (trainees, the students in initial teacher training programmes). We expected them to be critically reflective about their work and active shapers of the practices they adopted. We anticipated that they would have ‘important stories to tell’ about educational processes.

Professional practice within learning and skills organisation exist against the background of rapid change in modern societies where, as some have argued, ‘people need, constantly, to work on their biographies and find some authentic rhythms, in the lights of change, and to find the resources of hope... to compose a biography, and some stability, meaning and authenticity, from the fragments of shifting experience’ (West et al. 2007). The ‘biographical turn’ is thus not simply connected to the adoption of new research methods and methodologies in the study of adult learning. It is also motivated by an explicit intent to bring different dimensions of the learning of adults into view, and to understand these dimensions in relation to transformations in late- or post-modern societies,

without reducing them to such transformations (Biesta et al. 2008). As many learning and skills teachers are responsible for the education of adults, it is incumbent on them to be sensitive to such developments and to be reflexively aware of such conceptualisations of learning.

There follow two sections that use stories drawn mainly from the educational journeys of trainees to investigate two features of their course that have acquired greater significance within current systems of teacher training: the construction of an individual learning plan (ILP) and participation in processes of mentoring designed to address the development of expertise in subject-specific pedagogy. With the stories we ask whether these features encourage trainee teachers to be 'explorers' or 'tourists'.

What did trainee stories say about Individual Learning Plans?

In the interviews we undertook with trainees we found differences in perceptions about the purpose and value of ILPs among our small sample. We found that there was a range of influential sources of advice and support that people drew upon in their ILP production and we found that when trainees had any previous experience that they could relate to ILPs, this could have a significant influence on their current attitude. There were two respondents who were overtly critical of the ILP process, for different reasons, but most of our participants appeared to accept that ILPs had become one of the standard components of a training package for aspiring teachers. They complied with the requirement to complete an ILP as part of what they had to do in the programme but for some this was an informed decision while for others it appeared to be largely a matter of faith.

Edward was one who adapted easily to the situation. He was a man in his late 40s undertaking a transition to a new career as an engineering lecturer by taking a full-time PGCE course in a college. From his substantial experience as a manager for his previous employer he had an appreciation of relevant business systems and was able to adapt to the reflection and recording demands made by the PGCE programme. He explained the coding system he used for data included in his ILP; he produced examples of a 'SWOT analysis', his 'personal skills map', his 'teaching log' and his 'minimum core' records. He spoke of including records of teaching observations and of mentor meetings. He said he tried to spend some time on his ILP every day, finding evidence of achieving the standards from teaching, from working in a resource centre, from tutorial meetings and from educational visits. He said it took him a week to grasp the ILP structure but once understood he was able to work with it:

“Once that penny had dropped then I was off and then it's just, it's just become a big recording evidence exercise... You do learn from it and you can look back and recall it and reflect on it as well and you can also see how your performance is improving or not or how you're developing.”

Two young women expressed criticisms of ILPs from contrasting perspectives: Kate, a part-time PGCE student in the field of arts and textiles, dismissed her ILP as 'a bit of a waste of time' although one reason for her scepticism was the

mistaken idea that her PGCE ILP was driven by the funding requirement that is a feature of many training programmes, particularly in work-based learning:

“I think ILP’s are a funny thing anyway. I think they’re ultimately a bit of a waste of time, but I kind of - I know why we have to do them. It’s all to do with getting money... we haven’t done hardly anything ‘cos I think my mentor thinks they’re a bit of a waste of time as well.”

In the context of a busy working life in which she struggled to find time for teaching and studying as well as her paid employment, there was an issue around priorities:

“I suppose also they seem so irrelevant to doing an assignment... that’s the thing. I’ve got an assignment to do or an ILP and I’m going to do an assignment. You know, I only have so many hours in my day.”

She commented on the sceptical attitude from her mentor that appeared to be part of a wider staffroom culture in the college:

“This attitude may have come from other people saying, “Oh load of rubbish.” You know, I work in a, I work in a staffroom, I hear people talking about stuff, “Blar, blar, blar, bloody ILPs” whatever.”

Lucy is in her 20s and was another critic of ILPs, but her criticism concerned the way they were used by her tutors. She works for a training provider and was studying for a Cert Ed qualification. She said she used ILPs with her own learners all the time and finds it a really useful tool for monitoring student progress:

“...we can see what submissions they’ve got ... from their ILP and then we can comment on them and that goes to their manager and a copy goes to them as well. So from that point of view, [the ILPs are] worth doing because then the student can see like what they’ve got to do and what they’ve not got to do. So it’s like a tracking as well, isn’t it?”

Ian is in his 30s and also undertaking a part-time PGCE at a college. He is married with a young son and shares responsibility for paid part-time employment and child care with his wife. In our interview he confirmed he was aware of the ILP and its structure of checklists, teaching logs, observations, reflections. He has faith that the standards are there for a reason and that they help new teachers:

“obviously standards are there for a reason and when you’re doing your scheme of work, you know, lesson plans you know, obviously you want to try and implement standards in some of the objectives.”

He best exemplified the compliant attitude we encountered:

“I think the, the value of [the standards] will perhaps kick in, you know, as everything else becomes more normal. At the moment, you know, I’m thinking all the time of the lesson plans, scheme of work, etcetera, etcetera. I’ve got to do this and once that becomes done, then you know, perhaps pay more attention and focus to the standards.”

In the interview he expressed regret that he did not manage to go home everyday and reflect on the standards in his teaching log. He was another

for whom there are other priorities and he listed his son and his classroom teaching responsibilities as having priority over the ILP:

“I just, like I say, time is a bad excuse, but I know that after this I’ve got to go and pick my son up, then I’ve got to go and take him home and then I’ve got to make sure he’s all right, and then I’ve got to prepare for coaching over the weekend and de-da, de-da, de-da and it just gets pushed, pushed further back and then a week later I’ve got to do it and I’m, “Oh hang on a sec, what did I do there and stuff?”

Completing an ILP is just one of many course demands.

Among our small sample of ten trainees, therefore, we found a range of views of the significance of ILPs and how they might relate to achieving standards within a training programme. Such differences had little to do with the programme or its level: two of our interviewees were critical, even contemptuous of the process and one was a part-time PGCE student and the other was a PTLLS student. Most were accepting of the process: although lacking awareness of any immediate benefits from completing an ILP, they had faith that the importance would become apparent eventually. Even those who were accepting, however, did not consider ILPs a priority: there were many comments about pressures of time, particularly from those who had full or part-time employment to sustain; and within a training programme, the exigencies of immediate commitments in teaching or assessing students took greater priority than keeping the ILP.

Some of our interviewees had experience of managing ILPs with trainees or students of their own and such experience could inform a critical stance of practices within their own training.

We found a consensus among the interviewed tutors and managers that ILPs are in the process of becoming standard practice for ITT in colleges but contested views of how they should be used. One significant challenge is of reconciling the *retrospective* role that ILPs are used to fulfil, of tracking and recording achievements, with the *prospective* role they are expected to fulfil, of setting targets derived from the national standards. There was an issue of ownership and who should be fundamentally responsible for an ILP, whether it is a document for students themselves to construct, maintain and use or whether it is a document to enable supervision and assessment by tutors. There were issues around coherence with other course documents and the challenges of accessible presentation on computer networks. There was an issue of quality assurance and how to meet the expectations of an Ofsted inspection.

What did trainee stories say about mentoring?

From interviewing our ten trainee teachers it emerged that four had mentors where a good personal relationship had been established and the mentor made a valued contribution to a trainee’s personal and professional development. Three did not value their mentor’s contribution, though for differing reasons: one trainee had only recently found a mentor and two others had not worked with mentors in their programmes. Seven of the trainees expressed their particular appreciation of others in the workplace –colleagues or line-managers– who

were supportive of their professional development. In what follows we comment particularly on the qualities that trainees appreciated in their mentors.

Edward told us of a successful career in engineering and management before joining a full-time PGCE course to become a teacher and recalled his experiences of mentoring as a senior manager:

“Whenever I’ve coached or mentored people I’ve always gone deep, let them get to point where they don’t know something, they’re not sure of something, a contradiction or, you know, ignorance, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” “Stop, make a note, that’s your objective for the next one. I want to know what that means and you’re going to explain it to me and you have a week to do so. Okay? Right, do you want to carry on or do you want to stop?”

He was a trainee with a developed sense of what mentoring could and should be and with skills in being a mentor and he was not particularly impressed by the subject mentor he was allocated in his training programme. With his recent, high-level industrial experience it was evident that, in many respects, his ‘subject expertise’ was substantially greater than his college colleagues so there was little indication from him that subject-specific mentoring had been beneficial.

A favourable impression of his mentor was gained from Graham, a much younger trainee who was just starting a DTLLS course. Graham had extensive experience of the catering industry overseas and locally but he had decided he could best use his passion for teaching about food inside a college. When asked what he thought were the qualities of a good mentor he reflected on his own experience of working with his mentor though not once referring to subject expertise:

“Well, they’ve got to be accessible. If you’ve got a mentor that you can’t get hold of it’s a very difficult thing. So I’m guessing to be nice but to be honest and straight down the line so you know what you’re expected, obviously they can’t be a scary person because you wouldn’t feel comfortable... I guess that the biggest thing that I’d have to say from [tutor name] is that she’s really, really passionate about teaching and I’m guessing that a mentor has to be passionate about what they do.”

Two young teachers taking the first year of a PGCE course on a part-time basis at different colleges gave us some insight into the working of mentoring for them. Kate has a creative arts background and talked of the need for a mentor to have ‘passion and enthusiasm, I mean that’s the main thing’. She had asked for a particular staff member to be her mentor because she found his work and teaching inspirational but he was not available because of other responsibilities. Her appointed mentor was a member of staff in the same college department but with a different subject specialism, in media rather than in design. She found him to be a nice man and an approachable person but not really a help in the development of her teaching abilities.

Ian was a teacher of outdoor education and, like Kate, had someone in the same college department as a mentor while he undertook the PGCE course part-time. Ian’s mentor taught sports injuries and he accepted that as a good subject match. The mentor also had experience of practical activities that Ian wanted to gain qualifications in. The two taught together and had the opportunity

both to plan and evaluate the sessions they teach. This was probably the most successful mentor-mentee relationship we encountered in this study although the success was perhaps attributable to their shared teaching commitment rather than to their shared subject specialism:

“he gets really, really good grades from OFSTED and I love his teaching style and I’ve – the personality behind it, the passion that he’s got. It’s, it’s really good and he’s been great with regards to information that he’s given me, the feedback that he gives me. We see each other, you know, at least once a week, anyway because I’m in his lecture, we do lectures together and we get five, ten minutes after, five, ten minutes before.”

Lucy, a trainee in her 20s working for a training provider, was receiving one-to-one mentoring sessions based on her ILP with her line manager on a monthly basis and found them beneficial. She was critical that there had been little contact between the college and her employer and suggested the college were interested only in ‘ticking boxes’. She found the arrangement with her line manager to be preferable to the termly tutorials she had with her college tutor. Naomi and Janet work in the training section of a public sector organisation and were enrolled on a CTLLS programme at a college. A work-place mentor had been arranged for these two trainees, someone who had attended college training on the role of the mentor. This person was also their line manager and the trainees felt positive about the arrangement.

Subject-specific mentoring did not appear to be a pressing concern for many trainees. Successful mentoring depended primarily on the quality of relationship established between mentor and mentee and that relationship was more significant than the subject qualification of the mentor or the specification of particular mentor functions. What emerged from the trainees as being important were the personal qualities of mentors and their availability when needed to support their training. Qualities such as ‘enthusiasm’ were respected and the word ‘passion’ was used on several occasions. Needless to say, the word ‘passion’ does not appear anywhere in statements of standards (LLUK 2007a)!

Tutors reported a range of ways in which mentoring types of support can occur very successfully informally (for example, in ‘buddy’ arrangements) and also occurs regularly in formal systems (such as course team meetings) even though such experiences may not be termed ‘mentoring’. We found there was support among tutors for providing ‘subject-specific’ mentors for some trainees but heard that there were difficulties in trying to make provision for all, given the extraordinary range of subjects and courses that exist in the learning and skills sector. All the interviewed managers and tutors were committed to high standards in teaching and learning although the discourse they used about ‘standards’ tended to convey the expectations of experienced colleagues rather than the performance criteria of printed documents.

From all our interviewees it emerged that there was diversity of previous and ongoing life experience that people could relate to ‘mentoring’, a variety of formal and informal practices, many different ways in which other people had made a significant influence on professional learning. The result was that we encountered a complex set of understandings about what a mentor could be or should do and the role was valued in different ways.

Conclusions

Our approach in this project has enabled us to show some of the complexity of our participants' engagement with initial teacher training on the journey to achieving a qualification. We can see the ways in which "personal coherence, identity, a meaning to their life history" (Alheit 2005) have been generated by their stories of experience. We noted particularly how the trainees achieved outcomes that were perhaps surprising and unplanned, reflecting educational values rather than values that are orientated towards a specific training in a skill-set. It goes without saying that new teachers have all sorts of challenges when effecting such a transition in their career; there are inevitably areas of chance and uncertainty. Our project alerted us to the danger that the educational journey may be marked by obstructions and obstacles.

We found that ILPs exist widely in training programmes but they attract suspicion about their purpose: there are perceptions that they fulfil primarily an accountability function, that they are a bureaucratic requirement for funders' purposes. More significantly we found that students who were not necessarily opposed to completing an ILP did not see it as an educational priority when compared with making provision for their own learners or when compared with completing coursework assignments. The trainees also reminded us how such activity needs to be accommodated within the rest of their lives.

We found from most of our participants that trainee teachers can find companions for their educational journey who encourage and inspire them and support their professional development. The mentoring requirement under the new regulations is potentially a positive one that can be viewed as an attempt to ensure that all new teachers can benefit from the experiences of their predecessors. However, the imposition of models of mentoring that do not adequately recognise the need for new teachers to lead the process and set the agenda runs the risk of ensuring that a stimulating fellow traveller on the journey of professional formation becomes a tedious fellow tourist. It is questionable how far a mentor appointed by a course provider to have a summative assessment role can properly be considered a mentor.

The stories we have collected hint that there are particular losers in the sector as the system of qualifications has become more regulated and subject to inspection and they are teachers in non-traditional or informal educational contexts. They have found restricted access to the achievement of recognised qualifications. Many engaged in innovative areas of practice that emphasise the value to the individual and to the community of adult education have found their opportunities compromised by the latest attempts to re-organise teaching qualifications.

The rhetoric of government regulation emphasises achievement of the greater professional status that teachers in the sector have long sought. However, in putting into place models of provision derived from other sectors (notably from the training in place for school teachers) there are risks that traditions of practice in further and adult education are suppressed or that the quality of existing practices in teaching and learning are ignored in order to slake the unquenchable thirst of policy makers for innovation and change. For aspiring teachers in further

education colleges or in the learning and skills sector in England, there are challenges to confront if they elect to follow the 'yellow brick road' towards the status of Qualified or Associate Teacher in Learning and Skills. Our conclusion is that they are more likely to succeed in their careers and that they are more likely to become 'better teachers' if they set out on that road as explorers or if they are encouraged to become explorers as they embark upon their training.

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14. (THE MOST) DIFFICULT EDUCATIONAL JOURNEYS. SCHOOLS FOR ADULTS IN THE CHANGING SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Ewa Kurantowicz Adrianna Nizińska

Introduction

The system of adult education in Poland at the secondary and vocational secondary level is quite transparent. In its formal version it guarantees availability to all adults who want to supplement their education (at the lower secondary and upper secondary level), learn their profession (acquire professional qualifications at the upper secondary level) in various forms of education appropriate for working adults who have rich life experience and family or civic duties. This simple picture of access to education for 'second chance' adults gets very complicated when we dare to enter deeper into the reality of so-called formal education in Poland.

In Poland juveniles also have access to schools for adults. The origin of this process results from the lack of system solutions in educating children and youth, which are connected with a more and more numerous group of so-called difficult pupils, who, for different reasons (didactic and upbringing) are not able to stay in the educational system for children and youth. Due to this dysfunction of the educational system 'the solution' to the problem of these pupils was found in the educational system for adults. A legal and organisational possibility of juveniles' participation in adult education was created.

Of course the process of this enforced 'rejuvenation' of the system of adult education and its institution can be justified by quoting the benefits of inter-generation contacts, mutual enrichment and learning in different age groups. However, an important element are the teachers in schools for adults, whose attitudes to the learning process make adults return to the role of juvenile learner and, because of it, reduce their possibilities of biographical and social learning, which is so characteristic of the modern paradigm of thinking about adult learning.

These attitudes of teachers result both from the perception of an adult learner as a subject with cognitive disorders as well as from a principal demographic change among the learners of a school for adults (decreasing learners' age). With this development in the system of adult education there appears to be a certain pathology and a perversion of its basic function –educating adults. In our opinion, these elements make the educational journey of adults in the formal system of education more difficult. This journey becomes (the most) difficult, when it comes to the exclusion of adulthood from the identity of adult learners– this feature having been acquired and come into force as a result of life outside school. It takes place by the means of excluding adulthood/maturity from learners' identity, which is visible in the teaching methods, teaching organisation or preferred forms of education used.

Therefore the availability of education for adults is clear. Entering the system an adult becomes deprived of their maturity due to rituals present in the institutions (created by systematic pathologies, such as the presence of juveniles in schools for adults, who ignore (contradict, refuse to recognise) the adulthood of their students. This double loop of excluding adult learners is not visible from an analysis of the structure of the system of adult education.

Schools for adults without adult learners – the context of system and demographic changes

From an analysis of the structure of formal education designed for adults it can be assumed that it reflects changes which take place in youth education (minimum and still decreasing number of primary schools for adults) as well as specific social and market transformations connected with the increasing need to obtain education after graduating from a secondary school and the desire to be more competitive in the labour market. Therefore, one can assume that the growing number of offers of adult education is addressed mainly to those who have achieved a secondary degree and passed their final secondary school examinations before the system and economic transformations in Poland and who at present aspire to have a higher competence. However, the data contradict the above, showing an average age of learners of schools for adults and a big number of schools where it is possible to acquire secondary education (with or without the final secondary degree).

Type of school	Number of Institutions	% in all
Primary schools	10	Less than 1
Lower secondary schools	130	2
Upper secondary general schools	2116	31
Upper secondary basic vocational schools	119	2
Upper secondary specialised schools	1752	25
Post secondary schools	2807	40

Table 1. Formal adult education system in Poland (2005/2006) according to National Data Office

Formal adult education by authorities

One can obtain a lot of information from analysing not only the number of schools, but also the proportion of institutions that run such schools. The following can be mentioned here: public (state) and non-public based on public law and private institutions. The less popular the form of education is, the smaller is the percentage of private schools. For example, according to the data of 2006/2007 there are no primary and lower secondary schools for adults of such a status. However, private schools take over a significant percentage of the education market particularly with reference to education at the post-secondary level and this number is growing continuously, because of the increasing amount of clients wishing to make use of this offer. The

proportion of educational forms in this most popular educational sector (post secondary) proves that this provision is addressed to adult people, who already work and have families and other commitments –almost 90% of the offered programmes are weekend courses. Yet, according to the data – from 40 to 58 percent (depending on the education type) are students aged 17-20 and mature adults constitute a minority. This poses a question about the so-called educational efficiency of regular youth educational institutions and the question of why these young people are not able to finish school along with their peers in regular and free-of-charge educational institutions.

In the light of the fundamental statute of the Republic of Poland of the act dated 7 September 1991 on the educational system, education is compulsory until the age of 18. What results from the above wording is that the so-called compulsory school age, which starts at the beginning of the school year in the calendar year when a child is 7 years old, lasts till graduation from a lower secondary school, not until a student is 18 years old and it is accomplished by attending primary and lower secondary schools, whether public or non-public. Officially, one can apply to the school for adults immediately upon becoming 18 years old –if it takes place in the calendar year of starting the education. However, as it is pointed out by Cieślak:

“The fulfilment of the compulsory schooling duty of children and youth during normal education does not create any interpretation problems of the binding law. Yet, such problems appear in unusual situations, which take place relatively often in schools for adults. In particular this problem concerns lower secondary schools for adults.(...) Exceptionally, it is possible to accept a person into a primary or a lower secondary school for adults, who, on the last day of starting the didactic and educational classes is 16 years old and in the case of participants of Voluntary Work Groups – 15 years old, if there is a delay in the education cycle of this person and they do not look like finishing primary or lower secondary school for children and youth. (2006:13).”

People of full age attending a lower secondary school for adults do it of their own free will, as they are not covered by the compulsory schooling duty. However, the formal and legal situation of a juvenile person applying to be accepted into a school of adult education is different. Assuming that the person will be accepted and will continue education in accordance with the syllabus, the duration of their education will be convergent with the fulfilment of the compulsory schooling duty recommended by law. A common problem situation concerns a person accepted into a lower secondary school for adults, who is juvenile, but at the same time cannot continue learning in this school for a range of reasons.

The first exclusion of adulthood from schools for adults –problems with identity

Besides legal complications connected with the presence of juveniles in educational centres one can identify numerous difficulties connected with the

different educational needs of youths and adults. These difficulties become more and more important when we take into account the fact that the young people learning in CKU (a centre of continuous learning) have usually experienced many difficulties in coping with school requirements in their previous education. Very often these young people come from socially difficult circles, which are marginalised and, paradoxically, because of it, they are usually quickly removed from youth centres for being difficult and troublesome. Youth schools operating in the era of market competition have a big interest in removing these learners, who make the school drop in the rankings and reduce their competitiveness .

Even ignoring this crucial context it is possible to show differences regarding the educational needs of youths and adults. K. Illeris (2006), analysing development tasks in the context of learners' motivation and age, emphasises that what is important for a young person is the creation of the foundations of their own identity, while adults look to achieve goals in many life areas: social, professional or family. At the same time the writer points out that nowadays the way to achieve them can be hidden behind the continuous social changes, unpredictable future and numerous consequences of ostensible choices (Illeris 2006, p.231).

These changes originating from different life orientations have, in Illeris' opinion, also fundamental consequences for the process of formal education of adults and young people. For young people, regardless of the contents of education, learning is oriented towards shaping identity and can be understood only in this light (Illeris 2006, p. 228). Therefore, young people painfully perceive the inappropriateness/inadequacy of old-fashioned educational institutions and their syllabuses in relation to their need to shape their identity which is dominant in this period of life. In turn, adults learn what they think is important, interesting or significant for them. They make use of resources which support their learning earlier and they take responsibility for their own learning as far as possible (Illeris 2006, p. 233). The writer also emphasises that they define their goals clearly and can draw rather coherent strategies of their achievement.

“What we all must realise is that the adult's way of learning is very different from the child's and that adult education must, therefore, be based on quite different premises...[adults] learnt what they want to learn and what is meaningful for them to learn... [they] are not very inclined to learn something they are not interested in, or in which they cannot see the meaning or importance (Illeris 2002, p. 20).”

Also in the light of other concepts the educational environment of adults and youngsters requires respecting different rules. Malcolm Knowles (2005) enumerates the following rules of adult learning: they must feel the need for learning, they must be capable of self-learning, they must be motivated, they must have the possibility of referring to their previous experiences and they should have the possibility of a problem approach to issues which are being taught (Knowles 2005, p. 183). In his opinion what differentiates adult learning from children and youth learning are, first of all – other psychological predispositions.

“Psychologically, we become adults when we arrive at a self-concept of being responsible for our own lives, of being self-directing. With regard to learning, it is the psychological definition that is the most

crucial (...) So, we become adults by degree as we move through childhood and adolescence, and the rate of increase by degree is probably accelerated if we live in homes, study in schools, and participate in youth organizations that foster our increased taking responsibilities. But most of us probably do not have full-fledged self-concepts and self-directedness until we leave school or college, get a full-time job, marry, and start a family (Knowles 2005, p. 64).”

In the literature concerning adult learning one can also find such positions which say that principally adult learning does not differ much from children’s learning and that also children can be autonomous and independent with reference to the process of learning. (Rogers 2006, p.60).

Still a different approach emphasises not only the different nature of the learning process, but a different type of relationship. A. Rogers thinks that the ‘(...) difference between adult learning programmes and the learning programmes developed for younger people lies in that part of teaching-learning processes which concerns relationships rather than in the learning processes themselves’. (Rogers 2006, p. 65). The writer believes that first it should be understood how adult learners build their identity both as regards being an adult, as well as being a student and then it is necessary to have a look at how we –as teachers– construct these two identities with reference to our students. The gap between these constructs is –in Roger’s opinion– a basic reason for differences between learning and teaching of adults and children.

The authors of this text believe that it is impossible to treat adult and children’s learning as one and the same, and, therefore, these differences should be respected at the institutional level, in particular where the primary focus is on adult learning.

The second exclusion of adulthood from schools for adults – a teacher and rituals/practices of teaching

Teachers’ view of schools for adults on their students

The problem of the changing identity of learners in adult schools is also noticed by teachers who work in these places. The interviews with teachers carried out under a research project regarding the professional identity of teachers of schools for adults show that they experience new difficulties because of it (Nizińska 2008). In the opinion of one teacher (Barbara) working in such a school, most students who get there are not adult. Very often they are juvenile people who do not stand any chance of finishing their lower secondary schools. Moreover, they do not want to go back to those schools. She also mentions the following features of theirs:

- burdened with long-term didactic failures (a few-years’ delay in the accomplishment of schooling duty),
- a consolidated unwillingness to learn,
- various development deficits and micro-deficits,
- educational and upbringing gaps conditioned by environment pathology

- educational disorders,
- a lowered intellectual self-evaluation and lack of confidence in their own possibilities (material prepared by B. Lis, placed on the website www.cku.wroc.pl)

The extracts quoted below taken from the interviews with interviewees indicate problematic areas and the perception of this situation with reference to learners and the tasks of the school (CKU Wrocław).

Krzysztof (CKU) perceives his learners from the angle of their various deficits. He divides them into groups with the regard to their earlier education and with the regard to the problems they cause. He sees educational and didactic problems. He points to emotional and personality deficits (juvenile adults) as well as competence ones and the lack of basic skills (reading comprehension). However, he thinks that it does not make any sense to impose anything on those who have not firmly decided to learn. He thinks that they must become mature for that and what helps them is daily life, experiences and passing time (stray sheep). He notices the difficult family and material context of many students, he takes it into account and tries to understand it (they should get a chance):

“(...) here is a young person who does not meet these criteria of adulthood, a person who, as a matter of fact, came here, because her parents wanted it, this is such a person who does not cope here, because he/she does not cope with life at all, a person who, because of it, has their own problems, perhaps he/she has problems at home, because something has happened there. So it is often on the borderline of adulthood, in some cases it is the case that the parents are overprotective, in others – the parents are ignored and rejected and sometimes there is a period, which I could call a crisis (...)

(...) on the other hand educational problems consist in the fact that this group is seriously behind after finishing vocational school, as regards even primary school, this is a group where they often cannot read well and fluently, reading comprehension is a big problem for them. I'm not saying anything about the knowledge of history, because it is generally very low and there are few such people who know anything at the level of a primary school.

(...) the situation is such that children do not have work, parents do not have work and we do not face any educational problem, except for the fact that people often cannot afford some basic things, textbooks and therefore there are situations when I encounter a responsible and intelligent bloke, but he cannot afford a copy-book, so will he think that he is an adult person? He simply did not consider himself an adult person, despite that fact, that in my opinion, he was an adult person, (...) and this is so characteristic, this feeling of underestimation accompanies them, this is such a negative side of all these transformations and they have a negative effect on all these situations which we talk about in general, even if we talk only about education.”

Wojciech (CKU) does not consider his students adult, because they are irresponsible. He says that they demand rights, but do not accept the consequences. They are at school for various non-educational reasons, to get a piece of paper.

“(...) if you watched our students, our adult youth carefully, you would have, let’s say, a mixed attitude towards them... On the one hand they are adults, they want to be treated as adults and on the other hand they sometimes behave like brats, they, for example, play truant as it could protect them from a bad mark...”

In his opinion, they are not aware of what they want and they lack maturity and precision in defining their targets. Often they had bad experiences in the past, pathologies and experiencing violence, they do not have funds for education. They do not feel like learning, they miss classes, often repeat semesters and for many it is ‘the last bell’ for learning.

“(...) I must say to you that regardless of age the learners remain learners and whether they are 10 or 17 or, as some, 30, they tend to... to...wherever it is possible to obtain the most of something for themselves, if they can avoid the knowledge they avoid it, so this is not such a school which is attended by, first of all, selected people, these who know what they want to achieve in life and who come for it, in order to achieve it, it is not like that.”

“(...) these are people who have been through a lot, the problems are different, sometimes so shocking that it is hard to believe that they still have enough power to try to acquire knowledge and reach something in life. They are either from pathological or broken families; wives beaten by husbands, husbands chased by wives; the cases are really diverse.”

He thinks that they lack motivation to study; they are ‘life absent-minded’. These who attend special courses to take final secondary school examinations are different. They are treated as ‘the chosen’, because they represent a higher level.

“(...) some learners repeat and repeat these semesters all the time. They start as so-called full-time ones, finish as extra-mural ones, repeat again, try again, but they are simply people who have not convinced themselves yet whether they have firmly decided to acquire this knowledge or, let’s say, it is a temporary idea, a whim.”

“It seems to me that we need such people, because very often it is a last bell for some learners to start learning...the further, the worse, the more difficult. The very fact that they came, enrolled and decided to execute their decisions somehow is very important, but it is too little; as if anyone just expects teachers to give good marks for their very presence during classes...”

Teachers of centres for adults about the institution

Krzysztof perceives his institution (CKU) very positively, because, in his opinion, this is how learners see it in contrast to the relationships which they had in youth schools. The biggest problem for him is the issue of lowering the age of learners of schools for adults which he emphasised several times. He sees there the source of all the difficulties he faces at work.

“It looks as if youth schools exclude these learners who should drop out and those who could stay there and CKU is a school which should take them all and sometimes give them a chance. In many cases it is said that CKU is a nice school where the teachers are different, because they are normal, they do not shout, they answer directly, you can talk with them, the relationships are just like that, they do not stress people the way they do in a youth school, where whatever you do, you always have to be at school, because of the schooling duty.

Further on, taking into account other research which took place in CKU one can state the following things: a school for adults stops being a school for adults because of the radical lowering of the age profile and because, in many cases, we have to deal with the failures of other schools, i.e. the learners of this school become those, who in other schools... or other schools could not cope.”

Wojciech (CKU) feels a strong group loyalty. He is outraged about Torun incidents and says something like that would not take place in his workplace. Besides, he rarely uses the form of ‘I’ talking about his job; what dominates is ‘we’.

“(...) but if this circle allows for such situations they give themselves a very bad grade, because even if one individual has problems with bringing the semester under control and he/she will confide in one, two or three people who work in this semester, then it cannot be prevented - either the semester stops its existence or it becomes a well-behaved semester, they must know their position, they must simply know why they came here.”

According to teachers who work in schools for adults the learners of these schools are characterised by the following features:

- lack of confidence in their own capabilities
- they expect, first of all, support not only in the very educational process, but also from the psychological and protective side,
- they want and need understanding and help in using their new educational chances.

The teachers of schools for adults perceive their professional role in the following ways:

- breaking learners’ resistance towards the new school, in particular, encouraging them towards systematic participation in classes (this is the biggest problem),
- convincing learners of the necessity of learning not only in the context of complying with formal requirements,
- arousing and maintaining interest and work during classes,

- shaping (often from the beginning) positive behaviours and reactions in the school situations and relationships,
- care of a proper social, intellectual, emotional and health development,
- prevention of social pathology and addictions, help with problems,
- looking after juvenile parents.

According to what the people interviewed said, the upbringing and didactic actions of teachers should be based on:

- the creation of a proper and friendly atmosphere which would support and strengthen their development, appreciating the tiniest efforts (perhaps it is arduous, but effective in the long run),
- consolidation of a school and class team,
- understanding and help in school and personal difficulties,
- always have patience, but also firmness combined with responsibility
- a sense of justice and respect for dignity.

Conclusion

What results from the analyses presented is that schools for adults are only a certain facade, their name, the way of working, category of freedom of participation, etc. are used for actions of a socio-therapeutic, psychotherapeutic and counselling character with almost immature learners who ended up in schools for adults. In a way, in the teachers' opinion, the rituals of 'schools for adults' (e.g. using the category of a student instead of a pupil, emphasising the freedom of participation in classes, etc.) can help in the process of re-socialisation of drop outs. These actions have nothing in common with a classical adult learning's approach to an adult learner nor with adult education. The idea of adulthood, school for adults, methods and techniques of working with adults or other practices and solutions of adult education are used in teachers' re-socialisation work with learners and they may be somehow effective.

Schools for adults do not hold emancipatory or even compensation functions towards adults. Their symbols and language are applied in the therapeutic work with juvenile learners, who have dropped out of the educational system for children and youth. Therefore, why does this category of school (for adults) still function in practice? We think that it results from the transformation of the nature of the market. A group of customers (drop outs) emerged, who took control of the activity of schools for adults and enabled the teachers of these schools to work. This adjustment of schools for adults to the needs of this specific educational market allows these institutions to survive. However, as a consequence, formal adult education disappears and stops performing tasks for adult learners. In the case of the appearance of an adult in such a place he/she does not find it possible to survive and get an education, because both the institution and the teachers already expect a different group of school customers. Therefore, the educational journey of adult learners becomes even more difficult and access to learning in conditions corresponding to adult identity is simply impossible.

The questions which still bother us concern two phenomena: firstly, what happens with the system of adult education and how the restriction of the access to formal adult education will influence society and its economy? What survival strategies will be drawn up by adult learners among juvenile learners and teachers oriented for work with juveniles in an environment of an institution which is formally for adults, but with a completely different hidden programme of school functioning? How, as a consequence, will the learning careers change in Poland? We think that these answers will be important both for young drop outs as well as for adults wishing to make use of state-founded formal education.

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15. BRIDGING THE GAP: CHALLENGES IN SHAPING THE LEARNING IDENTITY OF ADULTS

Gerd Stølen

Introduction

This article will discuss pedagogical challenges within formal adult education. The importance of continued education is often presented from the perspective of those who administer it. Local, regional and state authorities see education as a commodity. These are the official voices. The distance between the intentions of educational institutions and the learning that in practice takes place can be great. For me, it is important to understand pedagogical and social processes that take place within adult education. In this chapter I will give voices to those who are usually tacit and do not participate in debates about the shape and function of education to the same degree as official voices. What is the experience of adult education from the students' point of view? The learners are dependent on the didactic and pedagogical competence of the teacher. Teachers are central characters in the everyday life of the students and I will also listen to their voices. I will ask the following question: *How is it possible to create a learning identity in adults who are forced to take education as part of an unemployment scheme?*

The empirical starting point is the northernmost part of Norway, in the county of Finnmark, an arctic area with borders to Russia, Finland, and the Barents Sea. The county faces challenges due to changing economic circumstances. Traditional ways of life have to change when faced with more modern economic demands. This includes getting new competences. Pursuing education as an adult can be the expression of a modern form of life. Beck (1992) claims that the modern form of life leads to many dangers and that we are forced to take the positive and negative consequences that follow our choices. My material is based on interviews with forty-one students and thirty teachers from both lower and upper secondary education (Stølen 2007). The students began their working life at a very early age in professions that did not require any formal education. In the communities dominated by the primary economy sector, school often lost the competition with local ways of life such as fisheries, reindeer herding, services, and handicraft. In the past this led to conflicts between pupils and the school. Due to illness and new requirements of education they eventually could not continue their jobs, and new life plans had to be made, the first step of which was lower secondary education. They are not interested in education and start under the threat of losing their unemployment support. The students felt very pessimistic and uncertain at first because of the immense challenges. In one year, the adults are to cover the same topics and take the same exams

as teenagers with a time frame of three years. Like all other people who have to make new life plans, the future can seem insecure and incommensurable (Berger et al. 1973; Giddens 1996). For those who return to school after many years, age and experience is no guarantee for them to succeed. Quite the opposite may be the case.

In Norway, Ivar Bjørgen (1991) has stressed the importance of the students taking responsibility for their own education. His ideas have been quite influential in the Nordic countries. Some have even compared his influence to a wildfire (Gleerup and Petersson 1999). However, the idea of a self-directed adult learner has serious flaws. In the literature on adult education, the mature student is often seen as highly motivated (Knowles 1980, 1984). This is not the case with the group in my study. The gap between their academic knowledge and the demands they must meet can be very wide. I will use these experiences as a way of discussing how we view the role of the teacher in adult education. If the gap between the practical life experience and the theoretical demands of a formal education is to be closed, a learning identity in the classroom has to be created by the teachers.

The article proceeds in three steps: I shall first go on to consider the experiences of the adults in the lower secondary education programme, before I turn to the quite different experiences in higher secondary education. After giving voice to students and teachers in these two different settings, I am going to discuss what lessons can be learned with regard to the role of the teacher in shaping learning identities. I will conclude that the responsibility for success in many ways rests on the teachers.

Adult education at the level of lower secondary education

In studies of adult education the time dimension is important. It is not enough to focus on what is taking place in the present classroom. Adult education must be viewed in light of previous educational history and plans for the future.

When the students in my study begin their adult education at the level of lower secondary education, they have already experienced school and work life. Their stories tell of bad memories from their previous education. They were disinterested and in some cases had academic problems. These students live in communities in which there is no tradition of theoretical education. Important knowledge was gathered through participating in local work life. A common feature in all cases was that the knowledge communicated through school seemed abstract and unconnected to the experiential background of the pupils. In the classroom there was little for them to recognise from their local communities. For this reason, education did not seem relevant to their lives. They learned that school was not the place for them, and many developed a bad relationship to education. For years they have thought that education has no relevance to them.

As mentioned, the students begin adult education at this level due to illness, problems at work, educational problems, and new possibilities of education. They have to adjust themselves to a work market that demands formal

education. Most of them feel forced to begin their education in order not to lose their unemployment benefits; therefore, they have the feeling that others are making plans for them.

When they now approach school again, most of them feel uncertain and negative. These students are again meeting traditional academic disciplines such as Norwegian, mathematics, and English in traditional school buildings with classrooms, desks, blackboards, and a characteristic smell. Certain arrangements have been made to accommodate the adults; they can make coffee in the classroom. Even though many of them at the outset are sceptical, most plan more education by the end of the year. What happens to them between the first and the last day at school that makes this change of mind possible? Let us listen to some of the students:

Lise (19 years) tells:

“It was difficult to concentrate in the beginning. Sitting down being taught was the worst. You disconnected your mind completely.”

Knut (23 years) experienced a sudden change:

“Things turned around quickly. I got a lot of good help and got good grades. I had never thought that I would think it was fun to be at school. This year at school has meant a lot. Now I know where I stand compared to all the requirements.”

Trude (32 years) feels the mood of the class is very positive:

“It is a nice crowd that encourages and helps each other. In addition, the teachers are good and helpful.”

Arne (48 years) has an even more positive attitude:

“Now things are going better, not least because of the good help I get from the teachers. I think of them as my friends.”

We see here that they are concerned with the community of the classroom and the efforts of the teachers. For many, it was a great surprise to succeed in their schoolwork and to find themselves thriving at school. It seems that the degree to which the education is voluntary becomes irrelevant. While the previous education was seen as meaningless, school now has meaning. The students give a lot of credit to the teachers for the progress they experience. Arne reports that he even made friends with them.

The teachers at this educational level say that they make a priority of creating an environment that makes it possible for them to succeed. Let us listen to how the teachers experience meeting adult students. One of them says:

“At the outset, I was sceptical to teach the adult education class. I thought we would get problems with negative students, and that we had to grapple with disciplinary problems even though they were adults. Those teachers who knew them from their previous education had many stories to tell.”

Most teachers in adult education can spot the academic differences amongst the student. The teachers also want to give them a positive reunion with school and not begin by confronting them with their lack of knowledge. They want to

build up the self-confidence of the students and in this way create motivation and determination. Another teacher puts it like this:

“We know that they don’t know. That’s why they’re here. I begin with what they’ve done, what they know. Then we approach fields they haven’t mastered. We have to encourage them before we get down to what they don’t know.”

All the same, it is challenging to take heed of the social challenges created by the differences among the students. When they have different ages and life experience it is necessary to create an including environment where people can feel confident. Some pupils are careful and caring, while others are more boastful and confident that they can master any situation. With such variety it is necessary to create an environment in which the differences are valued and seen as enrichment. This makes it possible for the students to respect each other mutually. Not all teachers were prepared to deal with such social issues among adult learners. Some were surprised by the rough attitudes:

“We worked hard to set some premises for how to behave and talk in class. It’s important to find a balance between joking and being serious, to find a level that most could accept. Some knew each other already and could be quite blunt in the way they communicated, while the rest of the class found the same things offensive.”

Here we can see an example of how important a good atmosphere is in the classroom. Many teachers stress how vital it is to create a good social setting in order to make the students succeed:

“It became important for me to create a feeling of there being a ‘we’. If teaching were to take place, it was important and necessary to create a different school than the one in which they failed. I’m glad I had this opportunity this year. They work hard, they are inspiring and grateful. I think it’s a privilege to have followed this process. Never before have I felt as useful being a teacher.”

My findings show that the teachers at this level (lower secondary education) have succeeded in forming a good learning situation in which there is a community feeling among the students so that they help and encourage each other. To embark on education as an adult can lead to a loss of contact with one’s ordinary social life due to lack of time and energy. Some also change attitudes in ways that generate distance to friends. Others are lonely to begin with. In all cases, it is all the more important to establish a new community within the classroom.

After having completed lower secondary education, the students now have a greater repertoire of possibilities in education and work. The new experience of mastering education makes it possible for them to see further possibilities within a vocational or a theoretical path. The students that pursued a vocational education soon found a combination of practical and theoretical education that they liked. However, this is not my main focus here. What interests me is the transition from lower secondary education to the theoretical path available in upper secondary education.

Adult education at the level of upper secondary education

Upper secondary education is the next part of the students' revised life plan. This programme makes it possible for the students to fulfil the requirements necessary to enrol at colleges or universities. This is a very challenging programme. The education is almost exclusively theoretical and for this reason the gap between actual skills and the demands of education can in some cases be too wide. The speed is high and several have to make adjustments in their selection of subjects (there is a certain amount of choice within the confines of the programme), while others drop out or fail at the end of the year. My data show that few students seem to profit from theoretical education. Many of them are in despair and even angry because they began an education where they experience defeats yet again. Often they remain silent about this.

I will let Nina speak on behalf of those who struggled, both those who eventually completed their education and those who quit. Even though Nina managed to get through she is very critical of her experience. Her story makes visible some of the conditions that are crucial in producing a good learning situation for students. At the age of 29 Nina became ill and had to quit her work as a cleaning lady. For her, education became a part of a revised life plan that was to give her new working opportunities. Her plan was, and remains, to become a social worker. She tells us:

“The programme was very hard. I'm glad I didn't know what I was in for. In the lower secondary education programme we had the feeling of being cared for. Here, the teachers didn't care one bit. They just put you down: 'This and this are wrong.' They didn't say that if you do like this, you'd do much better. There was no support to get from the teachers. They were very superficial.

You became mostly concerned with yourself. Everything was so serious. If someone tried to peak over you shoulder, you felt like slapping them. You were completely alone, and were in a fight with the others and the teachers. If you got 4 on a test, you got all desperate because you wanted a 5. There was neither cooperation nor solidarity. I think I was unlucky, though, because this was a class consisting of people that were very different from each other. There was no solidarity in any way.

I wish the teachers had been more interested in us, not in a personal way –but somewhat interested. Many people in a class have problems and it's not easy to combine your problems with schoolwork. They were experienced teachers who could have given us hints about how to do our work. They could have taught us some study techniques. Some students in my class hadn't been to school in many years. Even though the curriculum was massive, they [the teachers, G. S.] could have been more relaxed. They entered the classroom, said 'hello' –that's it– and went straight to the blackboard to go through the lesson of the day. 'And then you do this and this by then and then.' Everything was so direct; there was never any chitchat –not even a

joke. It became dreadfully impersonal, just like I imagine it to be in the military. I missed being backed up, getting a tap on my shoulder and a few words on how things would work out. This never happened. I was shocked because I was used to such things from the lower secondary education programme. The teachers there were very human, they both smiled and made jokes.”

Nina here describes a hard and rough everyday life at school. The academic demands drive everyone to the limit. The teachers are impersonal and only appear as professionals. Nina experiences that the teachers are not interested in them. She misses the feeling of being taken care of, both academically and humanly.

The teachers, however, express despair at what they see as misguided students led into situations in which they struggle academically. The learners lack basic skills needed to complete the upper secondary education programme. They have to master a comprehensive curriculum for which few of them are prepared. The teachers would like a thorough diagnostic assessment before admission; they see the academic problems as results of wrong choices and admittance based on wrong premises. This is what one teacher had to say:

“I often think about how difficult it must be for those who don’t succeed in adult education. In the class I’m now teaching there are people who are bound to meet new defeats. Nobody should have to go to school as thirty-year-olds and get a confirmation of not being good enough. This can have dire consequences for people with a rough history at school. I don’t like to be a witness to this. We do our best to get them through, but sometimes we have to realise that the basic skills are not there. One should make sure that the students who are admitted to the adult education programme are capable of completing it. If not, they should be guided onto another path. There are so many vocational possibilities.”

We can see here an example of how the teachers feel concerned about the strain they put on the students. Since the time frame is so short, they must have the command of some basic skills. For the teachers, it is hard to see them exhaust themselves while struggling with tasks many of them do not have the capability of grasping. These students will again experience disappointments within the education system that will be added to the list of previous failures. This can have a destructive effect on self-confidence, and for some another fiasco will be no less than a disaster. A vocational programme would have given quite a few of them better chances of success. The teachers are therefore critical to the admission procedures. One of them had the following reflections:

“With the best intentions many students are actually being done a disservice when they are given a place in an educational programme that leads to new defeats. Today, it seems as if many people start the programme under the threat of losing their unemployment benefits. Such a programme gives the students a lot of work while many of them also have family and other obligations outside of school. The education can be an addition to their other problems.”

Despite the fact that they are concerned by the low admissions criteria, the teachers like being with these students. Here they can focus on academic material. This group has a life experience that is beneficial to the learning situation. In classes of younger pupils they do not see the same motivation. While the students are strongly motivated, the teachers also stress their anxiousness to succeed. Many teachers feel that they have to halt them to avoid creating unnecessary *nervousness* and *anxiety*. Even though the school welcomes motivated and interested pupils, the teachers see that there can be a huge disparity between ideals and realities. They meet goal-oriented students with high self-expectations, while also unable to cope with too many challenges. School is a harsh world. It can be difficult to handle the enormous pressure. In some subjects, all that counts are the result from the final exam. The teachers have to follow national requirements; this can result in inhuman demands on the individual. A teacher of Norwegian looks at the situation like this:

We have a very comprehensive scheme and therefore a high speed. The students compete with each other. When you return essays it all of a sudden gets all quiet – completely gloomy. Then they look at each other: ‘What did you get?’ they whisper to the one sitting next to them. It is very quiet still. Then we have a break or I begin to go through something else. Afterwards I have to go around and explain what was bad. I often experience that they have a hard time accepting the judgment represented by the grades. That is by and large all right, but the competition is palpable and it is hard to disclose yourself in the form of a grade.

Here we get a picture of the tensions in the classroom and how difficult it can be for students to accept their grades. I have given voices to those involved in the field of adult education, both in lower and higher secondary education. In the latter category, I concentrated on the theoretical course that prepares adults for higher education –a programme that seems to be necessary to reorient oneself within a modern and complex work market. How can we understand adult education as illustrated in this way?

Challenges in adult education: Bridging the gap

Adjusting to the academic and social manifold that exists in an adult education class can be a new challenge for the teachers. Adults who return to school differ in age and experiences from education and work life. They have different theoretical starting points and not least different motives for returning to school. This becomes obvious in the interaction within the classroom. In classes where many view their education as forced upon them, the lack of interest can be a problem both for the individual pupils and for the companionship among them. The motivation to learning among adults depends on the extent to which teachers handle these differences.

Knox (1986) is one of many who have tried to come to the rescue in how to deal with this issue. In his *Helping Adults Learn* he gives a lot of advice of how

adult education can be organised. He gives the teacher great significance and presupposes two forms of competence: Firstly, she should be able to conduct a *context analysis*; secondly, she should create a *learning situation* that makes it possible to avoid the reproduction of previous failures.

A skilled teacher in my study will make a contextual analysis and understand the life conditions under which the students live outside the classroom. In small communities in Finnmark the teachers know the life world of their students and the challenges they face when formulating a new and revised life plan. The teacher can see that what takes place in the classroom is a part of a wholeness in which past, present, and future all are fundamental premises. They can understand the relationship between education and society in a historical and sociological perspective. On an individual level, the biographical situation of the students, their age, gender, and ethnicity, is important. Illness, care responsibilities and economical problems are also very important premises for schoolwork.

The other competence that Knox presupposes in the teacher is her ability to establish a good learning situation. This is crucial to avoid a repetition of previous defeats. No matter how important education is to the life plan of the individual, the goal (the exam) cannot be achieved unless the pupil can get through the day. The teachers are in the position to create both situations in which the students can feel proud, and situations in which they are humiliated. Consequently, the teachers have a responsibility to establish a stimulating learning environment. In doing so, they must take into consideration the interplay of preconditions, goals, contents, ways of working, and evaluation. Furthermore, they have to address the dramaturgical challenges implied in communication, cooperation, conflict, and conflict-solving. The flourishing of the students depends on the didactic and pedagogical competence of the teacher.

In my study, I can discern a certain difference between teachers in the lower and the teachers in upper secondary education with regard to a feeling of responsibility for the learning environment. The statements show that the students experience the lower secondary education as more meaningful than expected. Many of the students were surprised that they actually succeeded and thrived. They express the importance of the community in the classroom and the contributions of the teachers who are friendly and helpful. Some also say that the teachers treat them as humans, something that seems a bit of a surprise to them. The greatest surprise, however, is that they master the academic demands and find the material interesting. At the level of upper secondary education the mood is quite different. Nina misses a good social environment in which the teacher gives students individual attention. She also expresses regret that there is no sense of community or solidarity among her peers. She compares her experiences from the upper level with those of the lower level where the teachers were human and even had a sense of humour. Nina explains that the teachers at the upper level do not care.

In conversations with me, the upper secondary teachers express concern about the learning situation of the students, but they do not stress the importance of creating a good learning environment like the teachers at the lower secondary

level. The teachers at the upper level are more focused on purely academic matters than those at the lower level. They are unable to see how needed they are, and even if they do realise their importance they are perhaps hesitant to become too heavily engaged. It is not their job. As far as they are concerned, the students who are struggling should never have been in the programme in the first place. Rather than taking responsibility for their pupils, they blame the social services for having misguided them.

On the other hand the teachers seem to share the view of Knowles (1980, 1984). Within adult education a lot of attention is given to self-directed learning. Adult learners are often considered to be self-directed and motivated. Knowles claims that there is a basic difference between the learning processes of children and those of adults. He introduces the notion of andragogy to signify the education of adults. Knowles contends that adults learn in ways different to children because they have more experience. They are also more self-directed than children because they are driven by an inner motivation. In Norway, the same way of thinking has been prominent in discourse on upper secondary education – the learners are to take responsibility for their own learning (Bjørngen 1991). He points out two conditions that are necessary in order so that students can be able to take such a responsibility: They need time to think and belief in their own thought. Bjørngen wants a change from the reproduction of knowledge to reflection about knowledge. This does not harmonise well with my findings in Finnmark. The students feel that they do not have enough time. The lack of belief in their own thoughts, make it crucial to be able to take responsibility for their own learning.

This faith in the independent and motivated adult does not at all correspond to the experiences of the students we have met. On both of the two levels of adult education that we have considered, the adult learners met academic demands that they have few possibilities of coping with. They have bad experience from the past education and lack motivation for their new educational situation. I have shown their need for teachers to take responsibility for the social environment in order to improve the learning situation. Actively engaged teachers seem to be a necessity in order to establish a situation in which adults can learn. The situation gets even more difficult when the teachers at the level of upper secondary education, as in my study, only teach one subject each. This makes it impossible to conduct the context analysis and create a *learning situation* that makes it possible to avoid the reproduction of previous failures (Knox 1986).

In Denmark, Wahlgren (2002) also stresses the point that adult education is first and foremost characterised by the way in which one creates a learning environment. In this context, an engaged teacher is the most singularly important factor, a teacher that radiates engagement and who believes in what she says. If this is the case, it is of less importance whether the education is voluntary or not. Wahlgren points out that there is a whole range of requirements with regard to qualifications that the teacher must satisfy. These requirements concern the person of the teacher, her relations to the students, and external factors outside the educational institution. The personal demands include

professionalism, self-control and flexibility, empathy and ethical competence. The demands with regard to the relation between the teacher and the students include communication skills and social skills.

Based on the criteria suggested by Knowles (1980, 1984) and Bjørgen (1991) I am not sure that the students in my study have the possibility of taking such a responsibility. It has to be an aim that the students are as self-directed as possible, something which can be made possible through the pedagogical leadership of the teachers and the facilitation of a good learning environment. I find support for this in Brockett and Hiemstra (1991). Looking at the development of self-directed learning, they disclose several myths. One of them is the presentation of self-direction as an either-or concept. Such an understanding does not make room for the challenges met by students and adult educators. There are different needs for support and guidance, particularly in the beginning. Also Brookfield (1986) criticises Knowles for making self-direction into the main characteristic of adult education. My case study show how a group of adults in a difficult period of transition meet a formal form of education that is quite different from the learning processes in their everyday lives. Self-directed learning is not a matter of course.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the role of the teacher in adult education and their challenges in creating a good learning process and a learning identity in adults who are forced to take education as part of an unemployment scheme. They were very worried about what would meet them upon returning school as adults. Now they were brought back to a previous stage in their lives, to an institution where they had previously failed. First I considered the experiences made as adults in the lower secondary education programme. Then I turned to the quite different experiences made on the level of higher secondary education. The students were surprised to succeed and became more self-confident. In most cases, they wanted to continue their education and therefore went on to upper secondary education. Those who followed the more theoretical path were soon faced with enormous difficulties they could not deal with. The same feeling of being a failure came back.

After giving voices to students and teachers in these two different settings, I discussed the lessons that can be learned with regard to the role of the teacher in shaping learning identities. In this study the gap between the practical life experience and the theoretical demands of a formal education had to be closed. I will conclude that the responsibility for success in many ways rests on the teachers. The role of the teacher in making these older, but also more vulnerable, students is underestimated in adult education. Only an active teacher who establishes a good social environment in the classroom can assure some success – or at least the avoidance of complete defeat.

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16. LEARNING IN LATER LIFE: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF PARTICIPATION IN CONTINUING EDUCATION

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Introduction

Despite a growing awareness of demographic change there is only little knowledge of learning activities in the Third Age. Primarily there is a certain vagueness about the reasons for the decreasing participation in continuing education in later life. When analysing participation in education, even drawing a line between different age-groups causes problems because statements about age can only inadequately be linked to calendric age, since it is not necessarily identical with individually perceived age and social norms of age (Göckenjan 2000).

Calendric age cannot be equated with biological age as it is an almost undisputed result of gerontological research that differences in performance can be related to social attributes as often as to age differences. Therefore, reduced performance can only partly be explained by calendric age. In most cases, preconditions related to job and social stratum are more decisive factors (see Lehr 2000). Hence, the process of aging is mainly human-made (Hacker 2004). In this regard, education plays a major role as a resource to prevent premature aging (e.g. Boulton-Lewis 2006). Therefore, continuing education in later life does not only mean making offers to certain age groups. It means much more that it has to be a lifelong endeavour if it wants to affect the process of aging positively.

As will be shown, different factors overlay unequal participation in continuing education between age groups. Thus, an objective discussion about possibilities and obstacles of learning over the life course needs to consider structural and individual preconditions for taking part in continuing education, especially structural requirements and opportunities of learning in gainful employment.

This paper deals with the subject of continuing education as a lifelong process¹, especially the development of learning opportunities, which is one of the most important factors for explaining the diversity and underlying inequality in access to continuing education in later life.

The following questions in particular will be at the centre of consideration here: How does the participation in continuing education in middle age develop and what are the differences between constant participants and constant non-

¹ That is why the focus is not on participation in learning and continuing education in “third age” or even “fourth age” (Glennendenning 2001), but on the development of participation in continuing education as a lifelong endeavour.

participants? What are the types of continuing education courses that are made use of (especially concerning place and duration of courses)? What are the reasons for not participating in continuing education? Is there a connection between the learning career and working life? To answer these questions, I will first present the research results in this subject area and then proceed to selected own empirical results. Finally, I will highlight possible interventions and areas which require further research.

Continuing education of older employees: current research status

In the research into participation in continuing education, there are two different perspectives on the potential contribution of continuing education to active aging and to socio-demographic change. On the one hand, continuing education can contribute to mitigate qualification-deficits, resulting from a lack of education and learning in earlier stages of life or technical and organisational changes. It helps to increase the working ability of older people and their time in employment. From this perspective, the main questions are if, and to what extent, older people take part in continuing education, if there are special offers for them, and which factors can inhibit participation. On the other hand, the potential of older employees is emphasized. Given the pressures of demographic change, this potential should be made better use of and be incorporated into personnel policy strategies of companies. From this perspective, older people are not only addressed as receivers but also as actors in continuing education, for example in intergenerational knowledge-transfers or in operative innovation processes. Both perspectives assume that the necessity and implementation of continuing education are closely connected with job requirements and entrepreneurial perceptions of older employees' competences. That is why both concepts have to consider aging-based and age-based labour conditions in a more comprehensive way.

Empirical surveys about participation and non-participation in continuing education indicate consistently that the participation decreases with increasing age. When comparing different countries, there are differences that point to local particularities concerning continuing education and the employment situation (OECD 2006:338). In some countries, differences between employees of different age-groups with regard to the time they are expected to spend in jobrelated courses are very small. In Sweden for example, the extent of time spent in such courses by younger (25-34 yr-old) and older (55-64 yr-old) employees is roughly the same at 150 hours p.a. and 140 hours p.a. respectively. In other countries, however, there is a marked difference. In France, for example, the expected amount of time is 350 to 400 hours for younger employees and less than 50 hours for older employees. When comparing the participation according to age groups, one has to bear these differences in labour participation in mind.

A representative population survey on participation in continuing education of people from the age of 50 and upwards in Germany by Schröder/Gilberg

(2005) indicates a change in interest, especially in professional learning and development, caused by approaching or attained retirement age. In this age group, the participation of men and women in job-unrelated learning is higher than the participation in job-related learning compared to the total population. In 1999, when the survey was carried out, 18 percent participated in non-professional and 10 percent in professional continuing education; the difference was less distinctive with men than with women (Schröder/Gilberg 2005). Conclusions about incentives or barriers for participation in continuing education of men and women from the age of 50 are interesting and relevant for future courses of action. Both groups want to stay mentally fit, grasp complex relationships and broaden their general knowledge. When choosing and deciding whether or not to take part in an activity, several factors play an important role: costs (75 % of women, 62 % of men), distance of venue (73 % of women, 53 % of men) or if there is an opportunity to drive there or share a ride (61 % of women, 44 % of men). That is why women stated more often than men costs or distance as reasons for not taking part in continuing education. The most frequently given reasons by women for not participating were –even at this age– familial reasons; men stated most often professional reasons.

Another reason for the low participation in continuing education is seen in the lack of supply. The opportunity to take part in continuing education in a company depends heavily on the support for, and the attitude towards, older employees. But empirical research shows that attitudes towards older employees in companies are neutral to positive, so it can hardly be seen as the reason for older worker not being included in measures of personnel development and continuing education.

Bellman/Stegmaier's (2006) research also corroborates this. They analysed the correlation between positive attitudes towards age in companies and corresponding opportunities for continuing education on the basis of the IAB-business panel 2002. They could not find such a correlation: companies that tend to ascribe deficits to older employees do not offer more or less continuing education for this group than companies that have positive attitudes towards aging and emphasize the experience of older people (Bellman/Stegmaier 2006).

Therefore, the problem is not the attitude towards older employees but the underdeveloped perception of older people as a target group of continuing education. This is also a result of our own survey about aging-related human resource development in companies (Iller 2007). It showed that companies see the basic necessity for a modified personnel policy in view of demographic change, but practical work is still governed by the needs of day-to-day business. Under these circumstances, an increasing provision of continuing education for older employees by companies cannot be expected.

To date, supply and demand of the target group “older worker” was the main focus of research concerning continuing education for older people and aging-based human resource development. The individual aging process, particularly the participation in continuing education as a lifelong process, has been widely neglected. The survey described below tries to close this research gap.

Participation in continuing education as a lifelong process – selected empirical results

I will try to answer the question why the participation in continuing education decreases with increasing age. On the basis of an empirical survey, I will primarily analyse the importance of the “learning biography” on the one hand and of the current opportunities for continuing education on the other hand.

The empirical basis of the presented results will be a reanalysis of the learning-related data of the “Interdisciplinary Longitudinal Study of Adult Development” (ILSE). The main goal of ILSE is to identify individual, social and economic determinants of a healthy, self-determined and satisfied ageing process. As an interdisciplinary longitudinal study ILSE offers the opportunity to analyze inter-and intra-individual differences and changes over the life-span as well as relations between environmental factors and individual development. The biographical approach pursued by the ILSE-study is based on the assumption that experiences in early life-phases influence the performance and possibilities of adaptation in later life in a unique way. Therefore ILSE provides a strong database to analyze the change and continuity in participation and the effort made to continue education in the middle and later life.

In the first phase of collection, the ILSE sample consisted of 1390 persons from East and West Germany, stratified by sex and cohort membership (born 1930-32 and 1950-52, respectively). The first data collection (t1) was conducted between 1993 and 1996, the second (t2) with $n = 994$ participants (return rate = 90%) was conducted between 1997 and 2000. The third data collection (t3) started in January 2005 ended in December 2007 (Schmitt/Martin 2003, Schmitt/Wahl/Kruse 2008). As in most longitudinal analyses, there were random failures in the development of the sample in ILSE. These random failures led to a minor but not significant shift in the composition of the sample, benefiting employees with a higher household income (Schmitt/Wahl/Kruse 2008).

The reanalysis will cover the learning-and job-related data of the cohort 1950-52 of the three collection phases, so that learning activities could be taken into account over a time period of 12 years in the middle and later adulthood. Both sexes and both regions are represented in the sample in equal parts. Regional composition does not in fact correspond to the real population structure (for detailed description of the partial sample, see Iller 2005). Altogether, the sample with data from all three collection phases is comprised of 407 cases. The relevant data for our question about social structural characteristics was descriptively analysed according to correlation statistics and the parameters were evaluated by a logistic regression analysis. In the next step, I will present first results of this analysis.

Surprisingly, about half at least of the respondents said during the third collection phase –when they were between 50 and 55 years old– that they had participated in continuing education since the last survey. That means that the participation in continuing education in the surveyed sample decreased only slightly. Continuing education in companies played a major role in the learning activities that were made use of. In all three phases of data collection, this

form of continuing education was the one most frequently used. By comparison, continuing education that is self-financed or state-aided is used less frequently. In times of unemployment, participation in continuing education clearly decreases. It is not surprising that unemployed people hardly participate in any internal or external learning activities provided by companies. But they are obviously underrepresented in the other forms of continuing education, too –except in continuing education supported by labour-market policies. Thus, participation in continuing education heavily depends on integration in the employment system.

Further reasons for not participating in continuing education are illustrated in Figure 1. In all three phases of data collection, the reason most often stated for not taking part is a lack of continuing education opportunities. Considering the significant variety of activities, “no supply” cannot be seen as an indication of a real lack, but as an information deficit or a mismatch between demand and supply. Most of all, it could indicate that unemployed people are excluded from the quantitatively most important form of continuing education: learning activities in companies. Moreover, the comparison of the three collection phases shows an increased relevance of the lack of educational provision. It becomes more important as an impediment, whereas the absence of interest on the part of the respondents becomes less significant.

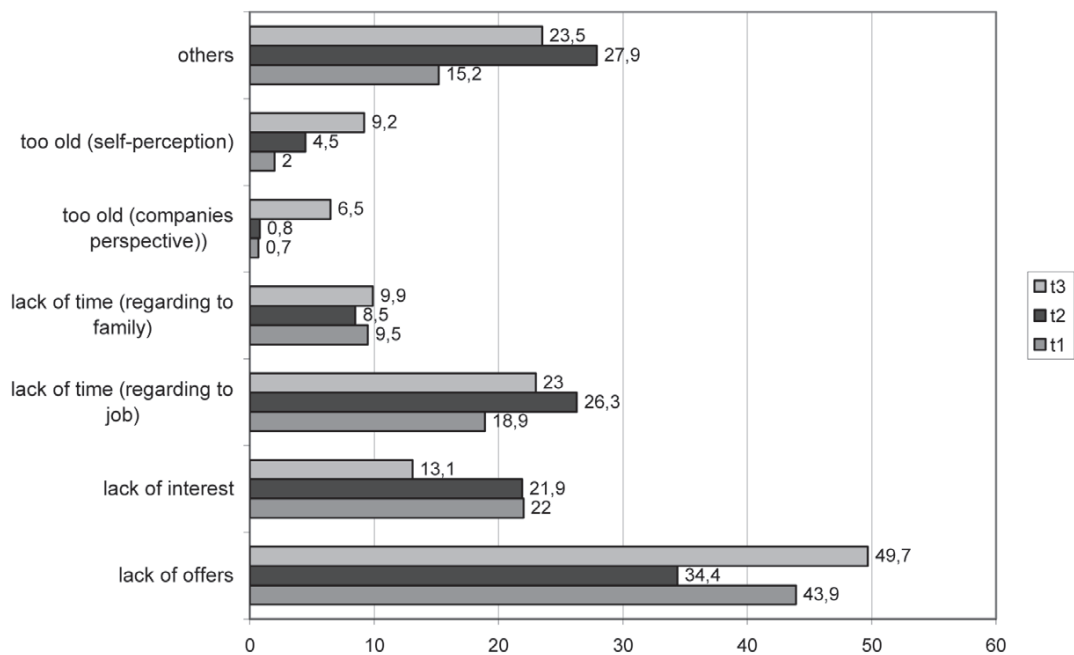


Figure 1: Reasons for not participating in continuing education in the three phases of data collection (Calculations on the basis of ILSE-data, n=153)

Lack of time in the job is stated as the second most frequent reason for not participating in continuing education from the second phase of collection onwards. This problem was mainly stated in the second collection phase. At this point in time, the respondents were about 50 years old, i.e. almost part of the target group of older employees. Therefore, it is very alarming that, at this point of time, job-related demands interfere with participation in continuing education for one quarter of the interviewed people. It also shows that there

are severe restrictions for an anticipatory, preventive continuing education. Age, however, only plays a lesser role, although it has some significance in the third collection phase –at the age of around 55 years. This corresponds with other research results about the definition of age and age limits in public perception and in companies. But the results presented in this paper point to an interesting difference: age is –at least with regard to participation in continuing education– seen as more relevant from the respondents’ self-perception (9,2 %) than from the companies’ perspectives (6,5%).

A pivotal question of this paper is the development of participation in continuing education over the life-span. That is why statements about participation and non-participation were related to all three collection phases². Figure 2 illustrates the individual changes in participation and non-participation. It also shows that there are continuous participants and non-participants. Based on the already mentioned participation in continuing education in the third phase of data collection of around 50% participants and nearly as many non-participants, two groups can be further differentiated. Most of the participants in the third collection phase used to take part in continuing education before. There are, however, people among the participants who did not take part in continuous education during phases 1 and 2. And there are, further, participants who had taken part before, but who no longer do so by the time of phase three. All in all, there are 43% continuous participants and 12% continuous non-participants. The majority, 45%, does not participate continuously in continuing education.

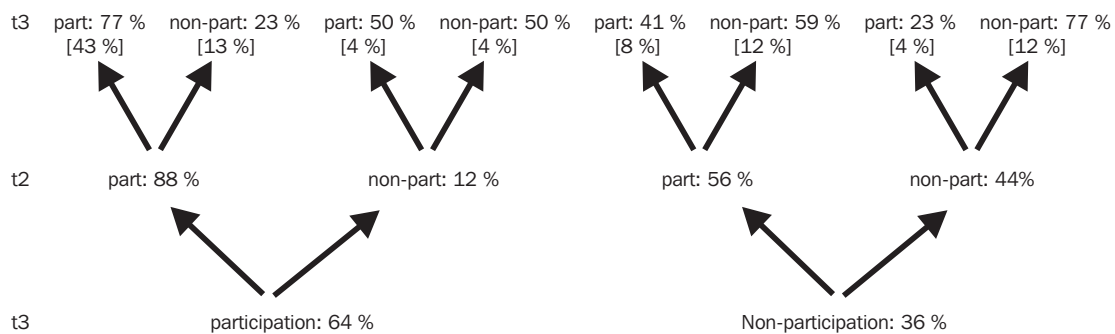


Figure 2: Development of participation and non-participation in continuing education in the three phases of data collection (Calculations on the basis of ILSE-data, proportion in percent of cases related to previous measuring times, n=253)

This raises the question whether there are ways of predicting the probabilities for participation or non-participation in working life. On the basis of theoretical analyses and my own empirical work, current working situation and biographies of continuing education were chosen as relevant parameters of participation in continuing education in later working life. With the relevant variables in ILSE, the possibility for participation or non-participation in continuing education at the third period of data collection was calculated, using logistic regression

² The attitude towards continuing education can be retraced to school education or school-leaving with the data of the ILSE-study. Because this data was collected retrospectively, for the analysis of the “biography” of continuing education, only the statements in the three measuring times were used.

(Bühl/Zöfel no date:336 ff). The results show that gainful employment in the third collection phase and participation in continuing education over the first and second collection periods explain a great deal of the variance (72% of cases). The influence of participation is highly significant during the first phase. The probability of taking part in continuing education in the third phase is four times higher for the participants in the first phase than for the non-participants at this point. That is why the biography of continuing education is central for the explanation of the present (non-) participation. The influence of current occupation is also significant: here the possibility for employees to take part in continuing education in the third phase is four times higher in comparison to unemployed people. Other factors, however, like satisfaction with the current situation or satisfaction compared to earlier times in the survey, have no significance for the probability of taking part in continuing education.

Implications for research and praxis in continuing education

Based on the empirical results above, I will now outline some possible interventions and consequences for continuing education. Continuing education will increasingly have to deal with people of advanced age who are experienced in continuing education. On the other hand, the factor of age alone does not explain decreasing participation in continuing education. There is an important difference between employees and unemployed people: unemployed individuals can participate less often in continuing education, they cannot easily apply acquired knowledge and their chances of finding new employment can be influenced only in a limited way through continuing education. Therefore, for older unemployed people special efforts are necessary to influence their participation in continuing education positively. Another important result is that the biography of continuing education has wide influence on the participation in later life. In the empirical survey presented above, only a relatively short stretch of adulthood was analysed: approximately 12 years in between the mid-forties and mid-fifties. Thus at this point it is already clear that lifelong learning and education have to be supported as a continuous process. In Germany a major problem is the structure of the market for continuing education. It is characterized by companies' activities, individual job-related learning activities –independent of companies– and by continuing education for unemployed people as a part of the labour market policy of the Federal Employment Office (“Bundesagentur für Arbeit”). These three parts are structurally separated from each other and have their own logics of action so that any overarching regulation is scarcely possible. Particularly learning in companies, which is a major part of professional training during the time of employment (see above), cannot be influenced by labourmarket programs in its current form. That is why the implementation of an aging-oriented continuing education policy in Germany, unlike in Denmark or in the Netherlands, is confronted with additional problems (Moraal/Schönfeld 2007). Examples of programs in Finland, Sweden, Norway and Austria demonstrate that a successful employment-oriented policy of aging is possible if the different groups of actors cooperate (Frerichs/Maier

2000). The success of these programs is based on interventions operating on different levels –the individual, companies and organisations and society– but not ignoring their combined effect (Ilmarinen 2004). By means of increased networking and international exchange, these experiences made in Scandinavia and Austria should be made use of for the further development of programs for educational and employment policies in Germany.

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17. DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE AND ALTERING LEARNING DEMANDS – “PEOPLE IN THE THIRD AGE” AS CHALLENGING TARGET GROUP FOR ADULT EDUCATION

Helmut Keller and Svenja Schuessler

Introduction

Plural and individualised lifestyle forms constitute a big challenge for adult education. The increasing emergence of heterogeneous and non-linear learning biographies, particularly with older adults, demand new responses from adult education providers. Developing adult education provision for a growing group of people at an advanced age is not just a quantitative endeavour. It also implies the qualitative question of how best to address this expanding target group in order to at meet their needs and interests. With a view to explore this question this chapter firstly elucidates briefly the new quality of a so-called “third age” in the context of demographic change in Germany. On the basis of current adult education work and its participation rates concerning representatives from the “third age” cohort the fit of demand and offer is scrutinized. This is followed by an outline of a study about learning and leisure interests of people in the “third age” and a presentation of its main findings. Finally how the learning needs of people in the third age could be better matched by formal learning arrangements provided by adult education institutions will be discussed in the light of the research findings.

Demographic Change and New Connotations of ‘Ageing’

The German society is an aging society, in which a shrinking number of younger people are facing growing cohorts of older people with steadily increasing life expectancies (Schroeter 2000: 86). In Germany, according to projections of the Federal Statistical Office, in 2050 there will be twice as many persons aged over 60 years compared to the number of persons aged below 20 years in 1920. Already by 2005, 23 percent of the German population were 60 years and older, a proportion which equals an absolute number of 18.8 million people. As a consequence, the cohorts of older people are more and more prevalent over younger and middle aged cohorts (Statistisches Bundesamt 2006: 17 et seq.).

In the context of these demographic changes, the emergence of a ‘third age’ can be observed, designating a period of ageing which comprises a new quality of life compared to earlier decades. It is a period of life between the ages of 55 and 65, when a lot of people still feel physically and mentally fit, when they are financially secure and not at least liberated from occupational, social and financial obligation (Mayer/Baltes, 1999). The ‘third age’ can be considered as a period of personal self-fulfilment, which is followed by the ‘fourth age’, a phase of increasing frailty and growing need for care. The third

age yet can be still experienced as self-reliant and self-determined. A higher qualification level, a better health situation as well as additionally available financial resources on average permit the representatives of this age group to enjoy their 'late freedom' actively and independently (Prah/Schroeter 1996, p. 83). Usually aged between 55 and 65, people belonging to the third age are also denominated as 'young and active elderly people (Fürstenberg 1990: 41; Schäuble 1995: 16; Opaschowski 1998:23; Kade 2007: 17). This contradictory perception of age has been provoked by the acceleration of the social borders of age and extending life expectancy, a constellation which has led to the postulation of an 'autonomous and active pensioner' (BMFSFJ 2001: 66 et seq.). As the physical and psychological conditions of the succeeding generations continually improve, the traditional deficit hypothesis assuming a steady decrease of functions during the process of ageing cannot be sustained. However, representatives from the third age cohorts have to get along with restructuring processes in this period of life. Such processes mainly concern modes of communication, social contacts and cultural activities, induced by a specific material basis, which is the main characteristic for the third age.

Discrepancies between Learning Conditions and Organised Learning Opportunities Concerning People in the Third Age

In their post-occupational phase of life –and this is a crucial fact– adults are mostly released from the pressure of immediately exploiting and applying any formally or informally acquired learning results. Instead of this, alternative and less instrumentally important forms of learning, which are often linked with voluntary work, start to become predominant. As a result and together with the differentiation of life phases and life concepts induced by increasing age, the anticipation of learning contents by adult education providers becomes more and more difficult the older the learners are (Kohli 2004:15). As a consequence, from the perspective of adult education providers the individual life situation of older learners has to move to the centre of attention and constituting the core criterion for didactic design (Brödel 1998:1 et seq.).

However, institutionalised adult education has been criticised for a considerable time that it is still maintaining a deficit model when addressing people from the third and fourth ages, although psychological research results prove the opposite (Eirmbter-Stolbrink 1994: 101 et seq.). An educational approach, which is subordinated to medical care and geriatric nursing, will not be suited to enable the self-development of people in the third age. It is further argued that any limitation implied by educational provision that restrict the articulation of learning interests of older people, topics and contents should be avoided carefully (ib.). Adult education organisations need to provide opportunities for the development of an age reality based on differentiation, taking into account the characteristics of each life phase and the respective differences of life situations.

Available further education statistics in Germany empirically affirms the criticised misfit between didactical design and people of the third age as

addressed (Barz/Tippelt 1999: 126). The data of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) from 2006 show that the participation rates of the age groups from 50 years concerning institutionalised and formalised learning provision is decreasing significantly. During 2003, 31 percent of people aged between 50 and 64 years were involved in formal adult education, whereas the participation rates of the cohorts from 19 to 34 years and from 35 to 49 years accounted for 46 percent respectively. If broken down in more detail, it becomes apparent that the lowest participation in adult education refers to the cohort of 60-64 years, averaging just 21 percent (BMBF 2006; 19). In his own analysis, Kohli (2004) argues that people from the third age are clearly under-represented, when evaluating the statistical data of the German Association of adult education centres ('Deutscher Volkshochschulverband').

The age of 55 years seems to mark a boundary, from which formalised education and training seems to decline in its importance (Schneider 2004; 24; Pehl 2005: 238). A particular dissonance appears with provision directed to the target group by denominating them as 'seniors'. Opaschowski (1997) noted that 73 percent of the retired people in Germany never attended such programmes as they mostly didn't feel it addressed them and were even affronted by such a denomination. Schröder and Gilberg (2005) found that only 4 percent of people in the third age participated in this type of provision. A slight increase in interest in such provision can be observed in those aged 65 and above. In fact, data gathered from the Age-Survey of 1996 showed that people in the third age focus their private activities primarily in the areas of sport and leisure activities as well as in engaging in informal groups. In a meta-analysis of available surveys Kruse and Maier (2005) affirm the relatively low importance of institutionalised and formalised adult education for learning and self-development of elderly people. People in the third age predominantly learn while mastering their everyday life (Kruse/Maier 2005: 536 et seq.).

It can be assumed at this stage, that from the view of adult education providers it is still quite challenging to attract people of the third age as learners on their programmes. This may be due to the problem that formalised adult education does just not have the functional value for this target group as it has been supposed so far or that learning interests and needs of people in the third age are yet not well analysed.

Analysing the Specific Learning Demands of People in the Third Age

1 Methodical Approach

With a view to contribute to a better understanding of the reasons that determine the participation in formal adult education settings of people in the third age, a survey has been conducted to explore the learning interests and needs of this target group. The survey was completed in March 2008 and was methodologically based on an explorative approach. In the context of the research programme 'Subjective Theories' (Groeben et al. 1988: 34 et seqq.; König 1995: 11 et seq.) guided interviews were used which were

evaluated with a semantic network structure technique called the 'Heidelberger Struktur-Legetechnik (SLT)' (Dann 1992:19; Christmann/Scheele 1995: 68) and afterwards communicatively validated in a dialogue-consensus. Since the method is very time-consuming, the samples are usually quite small. Under this study, just six people were interviewed, all of them aged between 55 and 65 years (three of each sex) and resident in Oberursel, a town in the catchment area of Frankfurt/Main.

As a complement to the numerous quantitative studies, which mainly considers exogenous factors, the sketched approach intends to reconstruct the perspective of the individual (potential) learner as a representative of the third age group but with a distinct societal relatedness. Such emphasis on an individual perception appeared particularly interesting, since the main question of the study focuses on aspects of organising and integrating learning and self-development in the post-occupational phase of life. Given the requirement of adequately analysing individual perception and sense-making the methodology of the research programme Subjective Theories seemed very promising for an empirical exploration. Subjective Theories can be understood as 'cognitive images' of a person regarding their self-concept and environment. A subjective theory therefore represents the inside view of a person and allows to make their actions better comprehensible and understandable (Schlee/Wahl 1987: 6 et seq.).

In order to reconstruct subjective theories, generally the use of qualitative instruments is preferred. In this case, the method of guided interviews was applied to ensure mainly uninfluenced perspectives of the interviewees concerning specific questions (König 1995: 14). It was also selected for the reason to create a pleasant and conversational situation. Following the interviews, the Heidelberger Struktur-Legetechnik allowed us to clarify the structure of the collected subjective theories through the help of charts. Contents and relations of cognitive structures were clustered and their visualization contributed to a better clearness and to an easier understanding compared with a mere written worded transcription. Finally, a concluding evaluation was conducted on the basis of content analysis and descriptive hermeneutics.

2 Preliminary Results

In the following section the main findings of the conducted study are outlined. Given the small sample stated above, the results neither pretend to be representative nor do they claim any generalisability. But they affirm and point to some key aspects concerning the specific learning perspective and learning demands of people in the third age that need to be surveyed more deeply in subsequent research.

As a first result it can be stated that those interviewed did not associate themselves to the group of 'old people' at the time that they retire. In fact, they envision themselves as 'young at heart', as 'mentally and physically fit', even though not as 'adolescent' any more. They class themselves as elderly people but disassociate themselves from previous and older generations and especially from the denomination as 'seniors'. As a consequence, people from

the third age tend to qualify the provision from adult education providers directed to elderly or seniors as measures mainly provided for persons significantly above their own age. Their own and primary interest concerning formally organized learning opportunities is more focused on age independent provision, although they admit that homogeneous learning groups are useful for the acquisition of specific skills (like the handling of new media based software and hardware tools).

A second result shows that those interviewed from the third age regard their post-occupational phase as a transitional stage which allows them to finally realise deferred projects and to follow interests already existing for a long time (like practicing a specific hobby or renovating parts of the domicile). The corresponding style of life can therefore be characterised as a quite active one. It is characterized by scheduled periods of leisure activities, private and formal obligations as well as spare time, which is deliberately reserved for spontaneous activities.

A third finding illustrates that in general terms leisure time is planned and organised without involving institutional learning opportunities and is even independent of institutions. The cultivation of social relationships and social activities is predominant. Not least there is confidence about an extended life expectancy, which will allow them to participate in formal adult education settings even at a later stage. From this perspective institutionalized adult education is primarily seen as functional for persons of the third age who do not pursue any hobbies or who only have few or even no social contacts established.

A fourth result confirms the interviewees perceiving of learning and self-development as integral parts throughout their whole life. They understand lifelong learning as a prerequisite for societal participation and integration. Accordingly, they are conducting learning activities as well in their current post-occupational phase. Yet these activities do not aim to position oneself in terms of career but to get along in social environments without any problems. Hence, most of the undertaken learning activities correspond to informal settings and they were chosen equally to maintain one's mental and physical fitness.

Related with the above finding a fifth outcome of the study shows evidence for the relevance of volunteer work as an opportunity for people of the third age to show their commitment to social issues. These commitments are undertaken quite readily as long as it is ensured that it is by own-choice and self-determinable. Voluntariness and self-determination are therefore two factors that are sine qua non for the acceptance of volunteer work from the viewpoint of people in the third age. The interviewed persons explained that they do not want to be other-directed from their social environment.

Finally a sixth finding proves that people in the third age feel themselves restricted by formal learning settings. From their point of view this is mainly due to the regularity and relative permanence of this kind of learning activity combined with a perceived obligation to learn and a certain pressure to achieve predefined learning results. As a consequence, the interviewed persons do not feel attracted by courses and programmes offered by adult education providers, which in the end causes a turning away from such provision.

Is there a Necessity for Alternative Approaches in Adult Education concerning People in the Third Age?

The needs of the people in the third age regarding aspects of formal learning –in particular: participation, transparency, communication and flexible arrangements– describe challenges which have to be faced proactively in order to better match offer and demand in adult education. The present study reinforces that older people do not constitute a homogenous target group. Therefore, adult education providers are forced to reach this quantitatively increasing group with adequate and differentiated communication strategies. Recently changing perceptions of ageing and age groups underpin this necessity for alternative portfolios of learning arrangements which sufficiently comply with the desire of people in the third age for voluntary, self-determined and active involvement. Intensified participative approaches could allow to better address especially the most active and mentally fit representatives of the third age and attract them as attendees of formal adult education settings.

The results of this study suggest that the involvement in the planning and realisation of formal learning arrangements constitutes an essential step towards the equal participation of third aged learners. This can turn out to become an advantage compared with informal learning when emancipation and socialization is easier facilitated by learners sharing views and having things in common. In addition, it becomes important for adult education providers that they consider the target groups' perception of their social conditions and life circumstances and to ensure its transparency at all stages of programming. This does not mean to support any de-institutionalisation of adult education, but to stress the necessity for increasingly flexible arrangements that prevent associations of constraints, pressure or obligation regarding the learning processes. The study results show that people in the third age want esteeming encounters and forms of learning which explicitly allow them to develop their skills and abilities. Not at least, alternative forms of communicating with people in the third age are of importance as it can help to avoid the stigmatizing notion of senior.

Adult education can only meet with the pluralism of needs and interests of third age learners, if it provides a differentiated framework of learning support and if it recognises the personal initiative of learners in the third age (Dräger/ Eirmbter Stolbrink 1997: 126). Instead of 'didactical paternalism', adult education has to show viable ways of learning that allow the interested elder learners to start from their current structures of competence and develop it further. Self-development and learning in the third age is not other-directed and should therefore not be lead by an exclusively defined canon of educational objectives and contents, but instead by the emerged patterns of education of elder people ('entfaltete Lebensbildung älterer Menschen'; ib.).

The new connotation of age and ageing is subject to continuous development and it is necessary to regularly ascertain its meanings. In terms of methodology this may imply to follow this study in a more comprehensive way, with wider time

windows concerning the biographies of elder learners and with complementary survey methods. No matter how, the learning interests, motivations and barriers of people in the third age are worth being explored more intensively and continually.

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III. COMMUNITY, GENDER, ETHNICITY AND AGE

18. THE PERSONAL AND SOCIAL TRANSITIONS ASSOCIATED WITH ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY BASED HIGHER EDUCATION

Ceri Jones

The Community University of the Valleys (CUV), Wales partnership was developed after the Miners' strike in an attempt to offer education for community regeneration. The partnership was between Universities and voluntary and community groups. Initial members included Valleys Initiative for Adult Education VIAE (formed to link community organisations with providers of education), University of Wales, Swansea and the DOVE Workshop in Banwen (set up to offer learning opportunities for women who had been active during the 1984/5 Miners' strike). Membership has now expanded to include four higher education institutions and fifteen voluntary and community organisations, including the University of Wales, Newport, the Open University and the University of Glamorgan, Tredgar Development Trust, Ebbw Fach Development Trust and Workers Educational Association South Wales (WEA). University of Wales, Newport's engagement in the Community University of the Partnership is in the eastern part of the provision and is commonly abbreviated to the CUV-East. No localised formal institution of Higher Education is located in this region of the Valleys, across the counties of Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen and Caerphilly. The catchment area for this outreached activity includes an accumulative population of over 300,000 (based on 1991 census data). The CUV-East developed the infrastructure for organising and delivering community based learning within disadvantaged wards in Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly and Torfaen. The CUV-East has its main base premises located in the shopping centre in Tredgar and offers the curriculum of the Certificate of Higher Education on a part-time basis, at community venues throughout the valleys of Southeast Wales. Recognising the need for 'bite sized' pieces of learning the Community University of the Valleys-East (CUV-East) project disaggregated 20 credit modules in order to provide 10 credit modules on a stand alone basis, through the process of incremental change. It became the project's policy to enrol learners, who wished to, onto the Certificate of Higher Education programme following successful completion of at least four modules. As the project has developed, new modules have been devised that have broadened the Cert HE curriculum on offer. Further European funding received in early 2002 enabled the project to consolidate its staff resources and to expand the number of community venues used and the range of modules offered. The majority of the provision is offered during the day and is supported by crèche facilities. Learners have the choice of attending one module at a time or multiple modules. Undoubtedly the European funding has enabled the CUV-East to develop a particular style of working which includes resources for recruitment and levels of support for learners, which would not be available on campus.

Student involvement in education or learning is defined by specific processes. Involvement in community based higher education with the CUV-East is no exception. This chapter draws on research into the wider benefits of learning carried out with a sample of CUV-East students during 2007. The aim of the paper is to use the point at which involvement in community based higher education begins to not only explore the complex social, cultural, familial and psychological processes that underpin the initial decision to take up the opportunity to study, but also as a moment in time to identify and clarify any changes that can be directly linked to the initial decision.

To explore the process of change up to, and beyond, the point of transition I intend to use Megan Walter's "Mature Students 3's" framework (Walters 2000) and Gorard et al's learning trajectories framework outlined in a number of publications (Gorard 1989,1990,1991) The main benefit of Walter's methodological approach is the fact that it places the "motivations, expectations and outcomes" of mature students' experiences within a fairly robust schema that emphasises the cumulative nature of the process of change. The framework has three discreet, but intertwined, elements that define change in relation to factors that underpin significant transitions, these being Redundancy, Recognition and Regeneration. To use a story based metaphor the three elements could be seen as the beginning; the middle and the end of a journey of discovery and change.

In relation to Gorard et al's theory the decision to return to learning after a significant gap places most of the students who are studying with the CUV-East in the "delayed trajectory" (Gorard et al 1999). This indicates that they have returned to learning after a significant absence. It could be argued that after substantive and continuous involvement a significant number of adults studying with the CUV-East have now moved into the "lifetime learners" trajectory. However, they also state that

"The odds of being a participant in post-compulsory education and training and of being a lifelong learner are increased if one's parents also fall into those categories. (Gorard et al 1999, 405)."

One of the key elements of their research is the belief that there is a strong causal link between prior family history and participation in higher education. However, this causal link cannot be overly significant for most of the students in question, in the sense that, most reside in areas such as Blaenau Gwent which, as census and other statistical sources attest, is historically one of the least active in relation to involvement in higher education. It could be argued that since the possibility of prior family history of involvement in higher education is statistically low most of the students have not only beaten the odds to become lifelong learners but also their involvement must be driven by other factors. In other publications Gorard et al (Gorard 1989, 1990, 1991) rightly emphasise the importance of time, place, gender, family and initial schooling as the essential determinants that underpin the possibility of participation in some form of higher education. The paper is aimed directly at these determinants which can not only trigger the original decision to participate in higher education, but also help frame visions of possible futures. The emphasis on transitions, in relation to the specific determinants, acting as precursors of change within

Gorard et al's theory is of central importance. The recognition and placement of a locus of transition for students involved in community based higher education will not only locate the transition in both time and place, but also create a pivot point to identify the factors that influenced the transition or any social, cultural or academic changes that were triggered by the transition. Allied to discussions relating to change are debates that identify the wider benefits of learning. The impact of education extends past qualifications and economic success: education can influence an array of aspects

The wider benefits are particularly of interest in the current climate of the accumulation of skills, as outlined in the Leitch review, being the key driver of learning policy. (Leitch, 2006) The work of the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning is also of central importance. In a summary of their findings they argue that:

“Education has wide-ranging and often sizeable effects well beyond the economy and the labour market. While these wider outcomes may also have knock-on economic impacts, it is important to remember that they have intrinsic value in their effects on quality of life, not only for individuals, but also for society. If we fail to recognise this, we risk also failing to capitalise fully on the benefits which education has to offer not only this generation, but those to come. (CRWBL 2006).”

As they point out education has an economic impact, but the economic is part of a process of change and should not be seen as the defining end product. To the contrary, only when allied to the wider benefits gained from embedding new experiences that have the power to buttress considerable personal and social transitions does the economic effect become really significant. However, a central difficulty in using a wider benefits analysis to challenge a skills driven imperative is the fact that changes in levels of skill can be empirically tested and verified, but to what extent they measure the full impact of community based higher education on an individual; a family; a community or the economy is debatable. On the other hand, the wider benefits of community based higher education are difficult to empirically test and are therefore difficult to verify, but the relative lack of empirical methods should not be allowed to undermine the implicit and inherent value of the wider benefits of community based higher education.

Prior History and Learning Trajectories

As suggested earlier the statistical possibility of the parents of CUV-East students being active in any form of lifelong learning and consequently able to influence their decision to return to learning is minimal. For example, census data shows that in Blaenau Gwent 80% of the adult population has a highest qualification of NVQ level 2 or below; as opposed to a UK average of 49%. Over 45% have no qualifications as opposed to UK average of 15%. At the opposite end of the scale only 9% have NVQ level 4 or 5 as opposed to a UK average of 16%. (ONS 2008) The statistical evidence was, to a large degree mirrored, in the other local authority areas covered by the CUV-East. In this context the possibility of parental impact is obviously marginal. When asked about prior family involvement in post

compulsory education participants almost unanimously indicated that they had no substantive family history of involvement in any form of learning let alone higher education. Only two individuals in the eleven groups indicated that their parents' interest in learning had driven their desire to learn.

As one stated:

“My dad was always learning something. He never said we should too, but he gave us the bug I suppose. He just seemed to be having fun!.”

The other individual also emphasised the ubiquitous nature of education, stating that:

“I grew up learning. I think my mam and dad just gave us a love of finding out.”

It would be fair to state, in relation to the individuals in the focus groups, that parental enjoyment of learning was the exception rather than the rule. It is of interest to note that there was no reference to parents with any history of undertaking continuous learning that would qualify as lifelong learning in any of the focus groups. In reality, for the majority, there were direct and often tangible correlations linking their parents and their own, experience of work based learning, and their experience of secondary education. For example, a number stated how their association with learning was directly framed by their parents being compelled to undertake work related courses. The link was eloquently outlined by an individual who stated that:

“My mam had to waste her time learning stuff she knew she would never use outside work. I saw how unhappy she was and thought I'm not doing that! It's taken 20 odd years to get over that.”

Another individual as a child thought her mother:

“Was going to a school for grown-ups and she hated it. So I thought why should I like school. Stupid or what!”

The sentiment of work based learning being seen as a necessary evil had a strong resonance for most of those individuals who had experienced work based learning. A number delineated a bond between work based learning and compulsory education

“All the bits I've done in work have been like going back to school. I don't want to be there wasting my time and I know some of the people teaching us felt the same. Just like school really!”

Without exception whenever “School” was mentioned it was accompanied by a palpable sense of negativity. A 35-year-old female stated that:

“I really hated school I just couldn't be bothered. They hated me and I hated them.”

The strength of feeling in this short extract was mirrored in the response of a 55-year old male who eloquently stated that his school experience was ruined by:

“A vindictive bloody teacher who seemed to go out of his way to make my life an absolute misery. I knew I could do the work, but I just got fed up and left as soon as I could. That was over 40 years ago and I still feel thick and I know I'm going to fail. But I couldn't let that b.... win so here I am.”

The negativity of their experiences resonated throughout the group's responses. With due regard to issues of reliability and validity in relation to any generalisations extrapolated from a relatively small sample, it is a sad reflection on the formal education system that experiences that in some cases took place over 40 years ago have such a significant impact on the way individuals perceive themselves and their levels of self-esteem. Undoubtedly in some cases the individuals contributed to their own downfall in relation to formal education, as one of the group pointed out

“I got to say that I was a bit of my own worst enemy in school I just didn't want to be there. It didn't really matter what they wanted to tell me I just wasn't listening.”

This one small insight into the experiences of one individual highlights the fact that in some cases people were unable to break a cycle of negativity and that progression through the formal education system was not a realistic option for some people. But it also could be argued that the problem hasn't disappeared and in 40 years time a researcher may be in the same position of being fairly astounded by the level of animosity felt towards, and the lasting negative impact of, a bad secondary school experience.

The most consistent attitude related to a belief that their previous experiences prior to becoming active in community based higher education lacked any substantive value. The key for most centred on the inability to apply the outcomes of a given learning event to any other context outside a narrow work or school related focus. The need to understand and apply knowledge would seem to be a pivotal outcome of any effective learning experience. If either element has limited merit the overall value of the knowledge is structurally diminished. Many of the students in the focus groups highlighted the fact that they had overcome multiple layers of pre-existing negativity to return to learning by linking negative experiences of their parent's, to their own negative experiences. The impact varied considerably from person to person, but it could be argued quite strongly that for some prior negative connotations forestalled participation in any form of post compulsory learning. When asked about any experiences of education prior to their involvement with the CUV most acknowledged the fact that after completing secondary education, with varying levels of success, their only substantive episodes of education, of any kind, were work related. In Gorard et al's theoretical frame the absence of substantive, or continuous, episodes of any form of education places the majority of the students into the “delayed trajectory”. The trajectory relates to individuals after leaving fulltime education had little if any involvement in post-compulsory education. In relation to the students in the various focus groups, the connotations of the word “delayed” were deeply significant. The word “delayed” has a number of implicit connotations from overdue to postponed to belated or deferred. Most of the connotations were evident in the responses, but they were all allied to a specific subtext related to the belief that the corollaries of the transition from a primarily non-participatory trajectory would be life changing. The impact of change from a predominantly non-participatory trajectory to a predominantly participatory form should not be underestimated.

As one student stated:

“When I stop and think I know I'm not the same. Now I know I can make big changes and not be that worried.”

Another argued that:

“I’ve done enough of this stuff now to know that I can’t go back to the me before I started.”

The implied realisation and significance of change allied to change in relation to identity explicit in both examples are not only the clearest illustrations of the specific subtext, but also reflect the emotive nature of most of the responses. It is difficult to paint the emotional impact of change in words, but for the majority of individuals the earnest force and life changing effect of active participation in community based higher education cannot be underestimated. The key, in this context, is the fundamental transition from the “delayed trajectory”. The transition from one state to another often includes significant change. The magnitude of the impact of change being, in this case, magnified by the length of time between leaving compulsory education and becoming involved in community based higher education with the CUV. If you can locate the transition in time and place you can, by extension, not only identify and clarify the factors that influenced the initial transition, but also the magnitude of any social, psychological, personal or cultural changes that were a direct effect of the original transition. However, change would not be possible if other pieces of a complex jigsaw were not in place. In relation to Gorard’s theoretical frame, two of the most important determinants are time and place. The key to understanding the impact of time and place is to view them as essential facets of cumulative change rather than isolated or discrete elements. For example, a number of responses referred to time and place as a single construct. As a mother with no family history of participation in higher education or any prior involvement in higher education stated:

“I wasn’t looking for something to do, but I just happened to be in the shopping centre in Tredegar and somebody gave me a leaflet. That started me off now I’m going to Uni full time!”

The serendipitous effect of time and place impacted on this person’s take up of a learning opportunity, and also changed the direction of her life. The possibility that this person may have found a different route to University must be acknowledged. However, it would be fair to argue that, in relation to Gorard’s et al theoretical framework, a single fortuitous event moved this person from a non-participatory trajectory. More significantly, the event changed her historical relationship with higher education and, if one accepts the premise that active parental involvement in post compulsory education increases the possibility that future generations will also be active, this historical change may effect the opportunities, possibilities and futures of her children. However, this only explains the importance of time and place in relation to demand. The reality is that they are of equal importance in relation to the supply of opportunities. If we use the example above we can see that if a leaflet had not been given to the person in question an unrealised demand could not have been met. However, the simple act of handing out a leaflet is underpinned by a myriad of interacting and sometimes conflicting issues that define the possibility of participation in some form of higher education. Although outside the remit of this paper, it could be argued strongly that serendipity has to be planned.

To sum up, the effect of prior history is complex and challenging. Breaking through, in many cases, multiple layers of pre-existing negativity is an achievement in itself, but the impact of breaking through for a significant proportion of the

individuals has been life changing. For many the cumulative nature of change is only really appreciated in retrospect when the distance travelled from the initial transition can be both contextualised and clarified. However, to truly understand the distance travelled it would also seem to be crucial to understand the journey up to the point of transition. It is also of significance to note that the ability to study in venues within their own communities was an integral element of the process of change for all the individuals in the focus groups.

One argued that:

“To start it was right for me. I liked just going down the road to be educated! It was safe I suppose. It gave me time to put things in place in my head and move on from where I was.”

Without exception they all placed great emphasis on initially finding a local opportunity to study. A point worth mentioning is the fact that the strength of the belief varied in relation to the number of modules completed. This is not to say that the retrospective view available to those who have studied longer held any more validity, but they were more able to define the impact of change simply because they had lived through the changes.

Redundancy, Recognition and Regeneration

As outlined earlier the key to understanding distance travelled is to locate the point of transition. However, this does not define the journey up to the point of transition. Megan Walter’s “The Mature Students’ Three Rs” concept gives a fairly concise method to untangle the processes that may impact on the point of transition. It would seem to be fairly safe to suggest that redundancy is an intrinsic element of the human condition, in the sense that as individuals move through their lives there is a process of renegotiation and reconfiguration that inevitably leads to personal, cultural and social transformation. This is not to say that most people live their lives in a state of persistent flux, but it would be fair to say that redundancy can act as a trigger for significant change which inevitably involves certain facets losing their importance to the point of becoming irrelevant or even redundant. Redundancy can take many forms and can have minor or major significance. The key is to identify how a sense of redundancy can trigger the decision to learn at a particular point in time rather than at an earlier or later date. For Walters’ redundancy relates to number of key trigger points. These triggers can impact individually, but are more likely to be seen in combination. In relation to the research study the most significant thing to note is the fact that all the respondents in the various focus groups alluded to a sense of redundancy being a central motivating factor that triggered their desire to return to learning. For a small number the key was a significant change in their “frame of reference” allied to changes in their “meaning perspective”.

For example, a consistent thread of “who I am” or variations on a theme was evident in most of the groups responses. In one example an individual chose to return to learning to get a clear sense of “who am I”:

“I’d really lost the plot. My life was in bits and I needed to start over. I got a leaflet in the post and thought that’s for me. I came along just to see what was going on and I loved it. It’s given me the time and space to know where I want to go and who I want to be.”

The examples highlight the importance of the “self-concept”. The trigger point relates to both a diminution of the value embedded in former meaningful roles and experiences and a need to create and embed value in new roles and experiences. The importance of “old” being subsumed by “new” roles, relationships and experiences seemed to be a distinct motivational factor that not only underpinned the point of transition, but also helped sustain and develop academic and personal journeys.

However, the most widely reported trigger related to role redundancy. As one mother pointed out:

“I got divorced in 2002 and my kids were old enough not to need their Mam as much. So I needed something to do for me. I tried going to the gym and other pointless pastimes, but the only thing that worked was turning up to do my classes. It’s just for me and I can just be me. Mind you my oldest is going to University next September and she’s trying to convince me to go as well.”

Again the importance of “self” is quite evident and creates a strong sense of personal attachment to the process of learning, but the clear transition trigger related to a perceived redundancy of both role and relationship. It would be too simplistic to argue that all redundancy is negative, but it would seem to be that case that most of the respondents have used fundamentally negative experiences to provide the stimulus for positive changes. The second “R” relates to the Recognition. In relation to recognition the key factor is the awareness and acceptance of change as part of a process of regeneration. It would be fair to argue, for some individuals, a sense of redundancy is also a fundamental building block of the recognition of the need for change. In some cases this duality is the prime determinant that defines that point of transition. One individual eloquently defined the duality when they stated that:

“I couldn’t keep doing what I was doing. I had to change.”

The balance between redundancy and recognition in this example resonated through the responses allied to a sense of dedication to make the transition work. A direct and positive correlate of the recognition of the need for change is the perception and recognition of actual change. It has to be noted that actual change was not seen as an intrinsic element of the process of transition, but rather as an essential component of maintaining and sustaining the impetus to continue. As one person pointed out:

“From where I was to now is a different world. I know I had to change and I have. Best bit is that I did it all for me. Can’t stop I got to keep going, I like who I am now.”

The sense of personal achievement embodied in and the significance of, life altering changes is clearly seen in the example. The future for most of the respondents was framed by the power of actual change and generated a growing awareness of the possible rather than the impossible. The importance of new directions, choices and the possibilities of new roles are intrinsic elements of the realisation of the possible as they not only embed the variations between old and new, but also imbue the new perspectives with more social,

cultural and psychological value. This was most readily seen in the symbolic value invested in being a university student. The level and emphasis varied, but without exception they all invested value in their new role. The significance not only relates to the new role, but also to the new opportunities, possibilities and futures associated with the new role. A slightly negative subtext in some of the responses related to a fear of losing the new found opportunities, possibilities and futures through academic failure, but the recognition of the potential of the new role to define new directions and new meaning perspectives was evident in all the responses.

As one individual stated:

“Didn’t think it would bother me, but I do like being a Uni student. It’s like it’s opened a door I didn’t know existed to all sorts of stuff I hadn’t even thought of.”

The pivotal importance of the allusion of a door being opened clearly indicates both the realisation that the new role acted as a portal to access new possibilities and an awareness of the distance travelled from an unnamed starting point to be in a position to metaphorically walk through the portal and access the new opportunities. In a related sense the enthusiastic adoption of a new role also clarified their readiness to learn, and the wider relevance of learning. The recognition of a transformation in relation to your attitude to learning is a powerful agent of change as it marks the point where the belief that, with certain qualifications, anything is possible becomes a realistic outcome of the academic and personal journey.

The essential components of the third element “regeneration” have, to a large degree, been addressed in the above. However, the regeneration of self-esteem needs to be given specific attention as it is this that proved to be a defining positive outcome for the respondents. With all the due caveats in place relating to what actually counts as raised self-esteem and an acceptance of the fact that measuring it is inherently difficult, it is still fair to argue that for the individuals in the study feel that their own perception of their self-esteem had changed significantly. Most notably they used the point of transition as a reflective fulcrum to delineate the distance travelled in relation to positive social, cultural and psychological changes. One respondent neatly framed the fulcrum effect when they stated that:

“There are two me’s. The quiet, lonely and nervous me before I started doing courses and the lot less quiet, lonely and nervous me now. The second me I’m really proud of.”

This was not an isolated response, as another person stated:

“My life’s like those DIY shows with a before and after. I’ve changed so much!”

To sum up, regeneration would seem to be an essential piece of a wider personal jigsaw that could not be completed without a reflective recognition of not only the distance travelled away from a point of transition, but also a detachment from the effects and affects of a given source of redundancy that underscored the journey up to the point of transition.

The Wider Benefits of Community Based Higher Education

I would argue that the wider benefits of education are an intrinsic element of academic success, and act as a base for significant personal, social, and cultural change. This is not to say that many mature students have a clear definition of their long term goals or understand the importance of the wider benefits of higher education. Some do have a plan which is more, or less, achievable but, initially; the majority do not see community based higher education as a means to an end but as an end in itself. This in no way demeans the initial decision to study, but for most the initial end product cannot encompass the wealth of positive experiences and benefits gained from the changes linked to their involvement in community based higher education. Change, in this sense, is the key to understanding not only the impact of the wider benefits of learning, but also how they occur. Positive learning experiences are underpinned by thought-provoking social, cultural and psychological interactions. These interactions not only validate prior beliefs, values and experiences, but also act as a resource to develop and define new social and cultural beliefs, values and experiences. I would argue the boundary between prior and new is where the wider benefits of learning occur. In an attempt to place this rather bold assertion in context all the students in the various focus groups who commented on the impact of the wider benefits of education measured it by creating parallels between their old and new beliefs, values and experiences. The key seemed to be to create a sense of time defined introspection in relation to specific discrete consequences in order to fully define the cumulative effect of the wider benefits of education, for all the students the fulcrum of the introspection again being the point of transition. One individual when asked to reflect on the impact of the wider benefits of learning stated that:

“You start looking at and for things you hadn’t thought about before.”

Another stated that studying with the CUV:

“Has lead me into things I would have never considered before.”

To all intents and purposes, the clarity of these short unequivocal reactions are the clearest examples of the cumulative impact of change. Furthermore, the linear introspection embedded in the word “before” not only situated the magnitude of change by locating a balance point to reflect on the distance travelled from a given point, but also located the given point in time. I accept that there is an inherent ambiguity in the word “before”, and that neither individual directly referred to, or defined, a specific point they used as a benchmark, but I would strongly argue that “before” in this context refers to their lives prior to the transition. For both individuals the new “things” associated with their academic studies implicitly subsumed old “things”. Although neither delineated what “things” they were referring to I would suggest that a fair interpretation would be that new surpassed old in relation to beliefs, values and experiences.

It is also of interest to note that both examples highlight a consistent theme in other responses. Both use exploration metaphors to define the process of change. These forms of metaphor imply and underpin a personal journey of discovery. In both examples the personal benefits are inextricably bound to the concomitant academic benefits to create a strong sense of the significant cumulative impact of seemingly discrete changes. To suggest that the benefits

of active involvement in community based higher education act, in isolation, as independent or dependent variables would seem to be overly simplistic. I would suggest that each element has discrete consequences, but each discrete consequence adds to the undeniably cumulative spectrum of the wider benefits of education. To encapsulate the discrete consequences of the wider benefits of education I intend to primarily focus on health related impacts. In relation to health issues the need to be more proactive was a consistent thread in all of the focus groups. To what extent the individuals follow up on their laudable intentions is beyond the remit of this chapter, but the intensity of their emotional, physical and in some cases financial investment in proactive changes would seem to suggest that they could not return to what many referred to as:

“Their old ways!”

Improving physical health through increased physical activity became increasingly important for a number of individuals.

The importance in all cases synchronised with, and used the transition to becoming a student as a balance point to create a sense of before and after. Allied to the importance of change was a strong sense of personal achievement embodied in changing the level of their physical activity. As one individual stated:

“I suppose I was a bit of a couch potato before, but now I’m not. I don’t use the car to come to my classes any more. If the weather is not too bad I walk I catch a bus if it’s raining. Never thought I would like fresh air, but I’ve met so many people I haven’t seen for ages.”

The example emphasises a clear and distinct personal investment in the process of change instigated by an initial transition. In the example the decision to change the physical also significantly changed their environmental and social impact on their community. It is of interest to note that there seemed to be a strong correlation between the awareness of environmental issues raised by various campaigns and active involvement in community based higher education to the extent that it appeared to be changing people’s attitudes to their own personal, social and cultural environments. For some the change simply impacted on their view of recycling, for others it had a more profound impact and led to active involvement in support of various environmental campaigns. The social impact on health although not as easily referenced as the physical, was of equal significance. The reduction of feelings of isolation and social exclusion were not clearly defined primary goals associated with active involvement in community based higher education, but they were significant outcomes. As one person eloquently stated:

“Only when I look back do I see the massive change in me, I have met so many good people and made so many new friends doing courses I feel part of something now.”

To what extent the social changes were a direct outcome of their involvement with the CUV-East, or could have been achieved through other forms of social interaction is open to question. However, the clarity in the reflective assessment of the impact of change in this one example shows the importance, for at least one individual, of positive social identity structures. The awareness of government led proactive health campaigns and changes in dietary regimes were also mentioned consistently by the various focus groups, but the factor underpinning

all changes not only in relation to health was increasing self-confidence. The use of the term “confidence” is inherently problematic, as there is no clear definition of the term and by extension it is difficult to measure. However, even when this caveat is accepted if individuals use the term we have to accept the fact that they must use a personal benchmark to measure increased confidence. When asked why change was possible now the transparency of the effect of increased confidence was most clearly seen. As one individual argued:

“Confidence, its all about confidence. I know I can change now. I want to change now.”

To gain confidence in any sphere is significant. Many stated that the hardest thing to do was to convince themselves that the outcome of the initial decision to study with the CUV would be positive. Many also stated that on several occasions the easy thing would have been to stop studying. Arguably the confidence gained from facing adversity and the realisation that their own resilience got them to the point where new possibilities, futures and opportunities were realistic options is the most significant wider benefit of active involvement in higher education.

Conclusions

The aim of the chapter was to use the point at which involvement in community based higher education begins to not only explore the complex social, cultural, familial and psychological processes that underpin the initial decision to take up the opportunity to study, but also as a moment in time to identify and clarify any changes that can be directly linked to the initial decision. Also the importance of time, place, gender, family and initial schooling as essential determinants should not be underestimated. As the evidence shows they not only underpin participation in community based higher education, but also help trigger the original decision to participate in higher education. The evidence in relation to the 3r’s framework seems to suggest that the effects and affects of community based higher are wide-ranging and often lie well beyond academic achievement. The point to emphasise is the intrinsic importance of transitions especially in relation to the three precursors of significant and sustainable change defined in the 3r’s framework. The evidence suggests that acceptance of these essential stages can not only trigger pronounced personal and social transitions, but also underpin active participation in community based higher education. In relation to prior history and learning trajectories the evidence shows how familial change in a historical sense changed the student’s relationship to higher education. It would also be fair to accept the earlier stated premise that active parental involvement in post compulsory education increases the possibility that future generations will also be active and this may affect the opportunities, possibilities and futures of their children.

The responses also showed the intrinsic possibilities of new perspectives and new choices embedded in the process of change. For the majority the realisation of the possible gave the new perspectives implied and implicit social, cultural and psychological value. In relation to the wider benefits of active involvement in community based higher education the evidence shows that academic achievements are significant waypoints and have an intrinsic and transferable intellectual value, but they are best seen as the foundation for other significant

personal, social, and cultural changes. For example, changes in relation to health related issues were not part of a pre-designed or premeditated plan, but the positive impacts of these fortuitous by-products are clear examples of the wider benefits of active involvement in community based higher education. The cumulative effect of seemingly discrete changes is the key to understanding the impact of the wider benefits of education. Each discrete change, if viewed in isolation, would not seem to have the strength to generate or sustain significant transformations. However, their cumulative strength clearly does have the power to confirm and bolster new futures, possibilities and opportunities.

I would argue quite strongly that the clearest affect of the liaison between the intellectual and the wider benefits of active involvement in community based higher education is increased self-confidence. It is problematic to argue that increased self-confidence is built on a complex and dynamic foundation of significant academic achievement and equally significant personal, social, and cultural changes as it is difficult to find empirical evidence to prove the assertion and is therefore equally difficult to verify, but the fact that it is difficult to find does not mean it does not exist and the evidence suggests that the relative lack of empirical methods cannot undermine the implicit and inherent value of the argument that confidence is the key benefit of the personal, social and intellectual transitions associated with active involvement in community based higher education.

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19. THE IMPACT OF WOMEN'S COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Maeve O'Grady

The development of women's community education in the Republic of Ireland has its origins in feminism, and significant moments in its establishment are described in this chapter. Questions that arise for providers are identified, and placed in the context of lifelong learning discourse and emphasis on training for skills and employability. One provider has initiated and supported research into the impact of the programmes, and the methodology of institutional ethnography as a means to identify the learning culture and its impact is explored. The theoretical framework of critical theory combined with feminist practice is examined to identify how these are reconceptualised to be relevant to meet contemporary needs. The arena of the social is emerging in significance as a bridge provided by the learning culture that enables women participate and develop.

Women's Community Education in Ireland has developed from the feminist movement as follows:

- 1970s: Entry to the EEC brings labour rights for women
- 1980s: formation of women's groups to fight backlash resulting from increasing human rights for women (Connolly 2003)
- 1990s: EU New Opportunities for Women Projects
- 2000: Mainstreaming of NOW women's projects under the Community Development Programme; EU capital funding for three women's centres; White Paper on adult education from the Department of Education & Science.
- The representative body for adult education providers in the Republic of Ireland, AONTAS, produces a policy document on Community Education in 2004, establishes a Community Education Network, and develops a Quality Assurance Framework for Women's Community Education.

One community education provider has identified questions to be addressed in relation to its objectives of social change and questions whether running programmes for working-class women actually changes very much. Evidence of individual 'progression' is collected and reported as a function of programme funding; evidence of the softer outcomes, the impact the programmes have on the identities of the participants, is anecdotal. The concern is that the less-tangible type of transformation may be ignored or lost in favour of focusing on the employability and qualifications outcomes sought by funders.

The organisation consists of two core staff members who are directly paid for by the state, facilitators who are paid for from programme funds, childcare staff who operate a forty-place facility, approximately sixty programme participants, and voluntary management group members. The staff and voluntary members together comprise the management of the Centre and oversee its mission.

Time is given for reflective practice and from this process of reflection, the researcher, who is a voluntary management group member, was requested to concentrate on these questions as her thesis for a doctorate in education with Sheffield University (UK).

This provision of women's community education shares the same principles and methods characteristic of feminist popular education as defined by Walters & Manicom (1996 pp12-20), which are:

- Starting where women are at
- Working for Empowerment
- Valuing Difference
- Facilitating a space, time and place for learning
- Gender awareness and feminist politics

The core research question is whether the work of the women's centre results in the type of empowerment that creates social transformation or results in social reproduction. To explore the impact of participation, Bourdieu's concepts of *field* and *habitus* (Grenfell & James 1998) are applied as follows:

- 1) Mapping the *field* of practice in which women's community education takes place, its relationship with adult education and lifelong learning policy and practices, and its funding sources from the state's community development programme, the national training agency, and the social welfare department. There is little relationship with the state's Department of Education & Science.
- 2) Ascertain the changes that happen in the *habitus* of the individual learners as they participate in programmes and in other activities of the Centre.

Using a qualitative approach and the methodology of *institutional ethnography* (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), I set out to describe the learning culture of the organisation, by suspending my usual dealings within the Centre, and becoming the resident researcher for a period of six weeks. Permission and agreement had been discussed with the groups of women participating in established programmes. I kept a field notebook of the daily activities in the Centre, the nature of the relationships, and the words of the women when in conversation with them.

The Institutional Ethnography approach allows the researcher to be an observer in order to describe the learning culture, and all the elements that constitute it – the physical environment; the social relationships between staff, voluntary members, and participants; the nature of the women-only space; the members of the groups who participate; the management activities; the childcare facility; what happens and what does not happen; what women talk about, and what is not talked about. The fact that the boundaries are unclear in the ethnographic approach also provided flexibility, giving me freedom to decide where to observe, where to sit in, and when to participate in an activity. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995 p.6) direct that the research should be sensitive to the setting. The researcher should be open to opportunities rather than seeking to enter an established group and ask to sit in on an activity. This was done by using an empty office on the top floor, and keeping the door

of the office open onto the corridor where participants and facilitators would walk between the training room and the canteen. It was also done each time I entered the building, by saying hello to all staff in each of their offices. This reminded them of my presence, and invitations to participate followed.

The theoretical framework for the research is provided by Paulo Freire's (1970) work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which has been the normative theoretical source for feminist pedagogy in the Republic of Ireland, influencing the handbook for feminist groupwork developed by AONTAS (1991). The specific influences of feminism are harder to identify, having influenced the emergence of women's groups in the 1980s in Ireland and their application in women's community education since then. There is a substantial amount of feminist writing about formal schooling and higher education, but few writers extend this to the area of informal, or popular education. In Ireland, Bríd Connolly describes herself as a feminist poststructuralist and reviews feminist pedagogy (Connolly 1997); Kathleen Lynch, a critical theorist, researches barriers to education experienced by groups who experience different forms of oppression (Lynch, 1999). All of the above make the point that if educators do not set out to transform oppressive relationships and structures, we reproduce them. Lynch and others (Baker Lynch et al 2004) extend egalitarian ideas to describe the various levels of structural transformations in education practice that need to occur before we can expect equality of participation rather than equality of access for marginalised groups.

International sources range from the USA, with bell hooks' criticism of Freire's gender-blindness and the need for feminism to include the perspectives of women of colour (hooks 1994); Canadian Brian Murphy (1999) states that community development must start with personal development; John Field (2006) in the United Kingdom considers lifelong learning in its relation to social capital, networks of relationship that can either be inward-looking and constraining its members, or outward-looking, enabling its members to develop in different directions; North American critical theorists in education such as Stephen Brookfield (2005) point to the need for educators to hold the ideal of social transformation while being realistic about less ambitious outcomes. Class and other critical and structural factors can combine to place women in a lower rather than higher stage of ability to construct knowledge, as described in the USA-based *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al 1997); Jane Thompson (1997), in the UK, calls for the provision of *Really Useful Knowledge*, that is, the knowledge that enables women to change their lives; Walters & Manicom's (1996) *Gender in Popular Education*, describes feminist pedagogical practices across the world.

The concepts being considered start with *Lifelong Learning* and its influence on the policy context: John Field (2006) critiques this to show its emphasis on individual upskilling for employability. Policy on adult education for active citizenship also reflects the neo-liberal individualistic paradigm. Freire's concepts of *liberation/domestication* provides a dimension for analysis, as do Bourdieu's concepts of social transformation/social reproduction. *Reflective practice*, the necessity for Freire's *praxis* in radical education, is considered by Ann Ryan (1999), Jean Barr (1999) and others. This can be linked to Giddens' (1991)

concept of *risk* in identifying the barriers experienced by particular social groups and his concept of *disembedding* shows the need, in contemporary society, for individuals to find new sources of authority as they turn away from tradition as a source of direction in their lives. *Biographicity* is the experiencing of life as shapeable: it implies a sense of agency created by connecting the biography, in a social process, with structures and enabling the opportunities that exist to be identified, considered, and acted upon. The self-reflexivity that is necessary to take increasing levels of responsibility depends on 'interaction with others and relations to a social context' (Alheit & Dausien 2007 p.67).

Reconceptualisation is involving consideration of the above in order to move past the type of frustration providers of women's community education may experience when thinking that there is a lack of visible social change or lack of apparent social transformation. The research is pointing to the significance of the elements of transformation experienced at an individual, personal level. These elements repair a broken sense of confidence and raise self-esteem, giving the individual the ability to apply the agency she has, seek wider support where she does not have agency, and an understanding of collective approaches to social transformation. The women gain Habermasian-type skills for communicative action –they are able to work in groups, and have a greater sense of empowerment as a result. They become more visible, they become more vocal. These elements of empowerment can appear small in relation to structures, yet the impact on the individual women is large.

Instead of a binary opposition between personal development and community development (social reproduction or social transformation), the intermediate space, which happens on several levels, needs to be recognised. For the individual woman, the first connection is social. This establishes safety and support. Then the political dimension can be addressed. This social stage of development takes place in a political context and a cultural setting. This cultural setting is at the meso-level, mediating between the micro-level of the individual experience and the macro-level of society's structures, providing norms and values about how to be a community activist, and providing a higher education qualification for those who wish to deepen their knowledge and involvement in the field.

At the macro level is the need for a social framework for lifelong learning which can help individuals connect their life histories, through biographical learning, with the macro. This can only happen through interaction, through participation in some 'learning milieu' or 'learning environment' (Alheit & Dausien 2007 p.64). It is the reflexivity required for such environments, which form the meso layer for lifelong learning, that enables the life histories of the individuals to be reviewed in a 'holistic learning' fashion. As individuals need new competencies, so their learning environments need to be flexible and reflexive. Existing meso-level institutions and organisations may need a paradigm shift in order to adapt (Alheit & Dausien 2007 p.61-64).

The type of meso-level provider who is already doing this is one that is self-managed, has an autonomous identity and an outward-looking learning culture. Autonomy means that sufficient time for the individual's development needs to be met can be provided: programmes do not have to be time-bound but can reflect the needs of each group.

Henning Salling Olesen states that to theorise learning in life history research, the subject needs to be reviewed in the context of the processes being experienced (Salling Olesen 2007, p.43). If the relationship between the learning culture and the desired type of transformation is established, then the autonomy of this environment can be defended in claims of the contribution it makes.

Reconceptualising feminism and Freire means that the aims and methodology of feminist pedagogy are available for working-class women. They have the right and the ability to collectively self-determine their learning needs, without having to identify themselves in philosophical or political terms: the learning environments are provided by those who do.

Findings that are emerging

The women speak about what participation means to them, and express themselves not in the language of formal educational outcomes, but in terms of notable differences in their lives – feeling recognised, no longer isolated, having a voice. Their conversations emphasise their sense of agency, while not mentioning activities or ambitions to alter the structures that marginalise them. The participants' conversations are saying that the sameness (of gender, class, and type of environment) reduces barriers to participation and reduces fear and risk –they say *“It’s like a home from home”*. They convey a sense of ownership and willingness to take on more responsibilities such as participating in the voluntary management structure because of the support they receive from their peers and their facilitators. Participants speak in terms of personal and social development, enabling their previous loss of confidence to be overcome, and self-esteem to rise.

The overall environment has a profound impact on the women who participate: it works for them by providing an environment where they feel valued, and feel better in themselves. They are supported by their peers, their facilitators and by provisions such as childcare. This enables different aspects of their identities to emerge or change: being seen, speaking, taking responsibility in a more public space, acting collectively.

The Women’s Centre is a local organisation providing a culture where being a woman is the primary element of identity, and the programmes reflect learning biographies. This is attending to social capital, defined by Alheit & Dausien as the way we treat those next to us. Everyone is an expert in this form of lifelong learning and nobody need be excluded (Alheit & Dausien 2007 p.63). The fact that staff and voluntary members of the Centre are involved in reflective practice is a significant element of the learning culture. It means that the values of feminist pedagogy are observed by participants.

The personal and social capital needs that are voiced by the women are very basic when placed in relation to learning careers in formal structures. The first element in accessing lifelong learning provisions is to see oneself as capable of learning. Many women who experience social isolation and marginalisation are not in that position. Field (2006) states that lifelong learning provisions exclude such groups and blame them. There is OECD recognition that availing of lifelong

learning opportunities is usually an outcome for people who have had a positive experience of formal education (Alheit & Dausien 2007 p.57). Extending the benefits of formal education to under-participating groups involves understanding the preconditions for success in lifelong learning and other public arenas, and giving resources to providers that meet such needs. Informal or popular education has an important part to play in lifelong learning frameworks and policy.

It is beyond the scope of this stage of the research to identify the impact of the learning culture in the years following participation. Is a woman's agency subsequently used for individually fitting into the system, or is the ability to work collectively applied in their community to change structures? The questions for a longitudinal study should emerge from this part of the research process, and indicate the meaning of a change in habitus.

Conclusion

Women's community education in the Republic of Ireland is a learning space where women can manage transitional processes. Making a change or transition involves self-reflexivity to manage life's competing and changing demands (Alheit & Dausien 2007, Giddens 1991). Learners come in as individuals, but it is the nature of the social interaction that enables them to review their life experiences and transform it into experiential learning. Providers need to understand people's biographies in order to provide opportunities for connections to be made between the biography, structures and opportunities. A provider that is able to incorporate the social processes throughout its culture ensures that the social process is not limited to the classroom but is reflected throughout the entire organization.

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20. 'I SECOND THAT EMOTION! –RECOGNISING THE IMPACT OF EMOTIONAL INFLUENCES IN BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH'

Isobel Hawthorne-Steele & Rosemary Moreland

Introduction

The complex nature of biographical research intrigues and captivates the inquisitive nature, motivating researchers to pursue this intricate line of investigation. In the context of the current study of ex-prisoners who embarked upon a transformational learning journey through higher education, one may ask what emotional factors are at play in the thinking mechanisms of the person who commits what society would term 'heinous crimes'? Burnard (2002:17) suggests there is a 'dark side' of human nature that beckons to know *all* the details. Relating the other person's experience to our own helps us make sense of the other person's world and creates an opportunity for the inner self to either keep hidden its intuitive thoughts and values and beliefs or to be prepared to disclose. There may be a propensity to seek out in other people their hidden self, their 'skeletons in the cupboard'. One has only to think of the popularity of documentaries and books which examine the motives of serial killers, the reality shows whose ratings soar when there are angry verbal exchanges between contestants, to name but a few. Having been immersed in biographical research for a number of years, the researchers contend that one of the key considerations in undertaking biographical research is the recognition of the emotional influences that have a profound impact on this type of research, from both the researcher/s and the participant/s perspectives.

A key problem underlying any biographical study is the issue of validity, particularly with regard to the interpretive nature of the study findings. Hatch and Wisniewski (cited in Brown, 2002:17) claim that *'truth and related epistemological issues can be seen in ways that go beyond the standardised notion of reliability, validity, and generalisability'*. They further argue that 'the net has to spread wider to encapsulate other factors that have meaningful constructs such as accessibility, credibility, explanatory power, persuasiveness, coherence, plausibility, trustworthiness'. The dilemma of how to get to the 'truth' in the retelling of the participants experiences and how to ensure their story is not the whimsical romantic version that participants prefer their life histories to be rather than the actual, has to be factored into the researcher's schema. Burnard, (2002) offers possibly the best model that explains the nature of disclosures from what he terms the 'real self'. He proposes that we each have an 'executive self', where the person presents what they want the world to see rather than what is actually the truth. Roberts (2002:6-7) asserts that

"The study of biographical research rests on a view of individuals as creators of meanings which form the basis of their everyday lives. Individuals act according to meanings through which they make sense of social existence".

The Biographical Approach

Before attempting to justify the rationale for using biographical research, it is necessary to define the term. Denzin (1989:28) succinctly captures the complexity of the interpretive nature of this approach and encapsulates the foci of emotional importance that is a central theme.

“The biographical method rests on subjective and intersubjectively gained knowledge of the life experiences of individuals, including one’s own life. Such understandings rest on an interpretative process that leads one to enter into the emotional life of another”

Atkinson (1998:8) attempts to address this issue, with regard to his distinction between a ‘life story’ which he defines as ‘the story a person choose to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by ‘another’ and a ‘life history’ which ‘is a fairly complete narrating of one’s entire experience of life as a whole, highlighting the most important aspects’.

This further serves to illustrate that biographical research methods do not sit easily within the social research framework. Social research depends upon establishing methods to avoid the problem of respondents giving their imagined and preferred life-script rather than reporting factual information. Such methods are triangulation where multiple types of accounts and relevant data are charted and gathered to better inform the research. Alongside the problems posed by deliberate misrepresentation of life-scripting is a more convoluted and complex dilemma caused by ignorance. The fact that respondents may be totally unaware of particular aspects of their social world has a profound affect on the biographies of respondents. The difficulty for the biographical researcher is to discern when respondents are not wholly aware of their social self/hidden self as opposed to when the respondents are deliberately misleading the researcher. One of the researchers involved in this a study was in a prime position to gather data and narratives from the students as they progressed through the course, due to the fact that she had a multifaceted role of adult educator, course director as well as researcher. From the traditional social science research perspective, this may be seen as problematic. However, within the biographical research framework, the various ‘hats’ of the researcher actually increases the validity of the research, since the researcher was thus enabled to develop a very special relationship with this group of student participants. *“This greatly helped to gain their trust, confidence and respect”*. As this relationship developed over time, the researcher was also very well placed to observe when a participant was attempting to deliberately mislead and when s/he was unaware of the hidden self.

Research Project Context

Having discussed the nature of the biographical research framework, it is important to contextualise the project within which this study took place. All of the students (participants) within one full cohort were ex-political

prisoners¹, from 'both sides' of the divided communities who in the broadest sense can be categorised as nationalist and loyalist. In Northern Ireland (NI) the Probation Board (PBNI) were challenged with addressing the need to reintegrate ex-offenders back into the Northern Ireland society and one of the most effective ways deemed to prevent re-offending was to ensure that employment opportunities were made available to ex-offenders. From the (PBNI) perspective, the Community Youth Work Training Programme was viewed as being a potentially rehabilitative programme which enabled participants to gain a professional qualification which would allow them to reintegrate into society, prevent them from re-offending and overall, to help reduce crime rates. The first ceasefire in 1994 brought with it an acceleration of the release of political prisoners and the (PBNI) took up a very proactive lead in supporting these ex-prisoners in the hope that this would set the pace for other organisations both in the public and private sector to follow this example. There were 14 participants involved in this three year funded pilot project. Negotiations then took place between the University of Ulster and PBNI so that the 14 students would complete the professional qualification of the part-time Diploma in Youth and Community Work. Alongside that they would be employed by PBNI in projects around NI with other probation officers and they would work in different roles in community-based initiatives. Initially they were required to work with a qualified probation officer and as time progressed and they became more proficient, some were then given the opportunity to facilitate, to initiate and to lead groups and individuals with limited supervision.

The study is posited within a formal educational framework that was in the first instance somewhat alien to most of the participants. The participants became students through this rehabilitation scheme that aspired to transform them from their 'political ex-prisoner' status to professionally qualified community youth workers, who would be expected to have attained the necessary academic and professional competence to work alongside and act as a role model for young people who lived within a contested society and to deter them from any involvement in antisocial behaviour, such as becoming involved with paramilitary groups. This stated purpose is in itself contentious when one considers that the training of professional community youth workers is not about deterring antisocial behaviour but rather providing young people with life chances and helping them make sense of their rites of passage - their journey from adolescence to adulthood. This wider purpose for professional training had to be defended many times throughout the lifespan of this particular programme not least in the journey through attaining professional endorsement for the programme. This in fact became the first milestone of the participants' transformatory learning journey, as at the start of the course they unanimously and emphatically agreed that they were best placed to work in communities where professionals could not. *'I have the experience and can relate better to young people better than any professional wasters, I can tell them how it really is, the professionals don't have the experience of doing time*

¹ The term political prisoner is defined as those prisoners who committed crimes which they described as being a direct result of the civil conflict in Northern Ireland.

- *I do'*(Participant). Participants were challenged to look at this from different perspectives and they were encouraged to critically reflect on how, for example, a male youth worker could counsel a female youth who confided in him that she was pregnant, in order to understand that not everyone needs to have had a particular experience, in order to help another.

Discussion

This research combines both the life history method where the participant tells the story to a researcher and life story, where the researcher uses interpretive language to present the written work of the participant. In this study participants were asked to write their experiences down through the use of reflective journal analysis and the researcher was available to discuss any aspects this brought to light for the participant. Therefore often the presentation was supported by further discussion and clarification thus reducing the risks of misinterpretation in the research. This serves to highlight the complexity and diversity of this method which strives to capture the richness of the respondents' experiences and can transcend the time constraints that restrict other types of research. It gives the participants time to reflect and engage in critical analysis that will move them through a cognitive reframing of past events, enabling them to process encounters with their emotional responses to particular situations such as reliving personal struggles and achievements, which can be a cathartic experience. This approach was introduced in the formative stages of the students' university life so that they could embark on a process that would enable them to engage in transformative learning. This process also allowed the researcher to study data from the earliest point of the students' formal learning journey. This process of biographical analysis is used in this research as a central aspect of the methodology in order to gain more informative analysis of the students' experiences.

By its very nature this was a highly emotive and volatile programme and in any attempt to track life histories and transformational learning journeys, a sound relationship had to be established between the researcher and the students that was firmly rooted in trust. The students were firstly introduced to this person as their course director, described as someone who would act as the buffer between the academic institute and their individual academic progress. Through the course of time this person would also become an educator to them, sharing knowledge and expertise and unlocking their potential. The relationship between the researcher and students developed sufficiently to the point where the students could fully trust the person to research their transformatory journeys. The beginning of this relationship can be charted through the first task of acclimatising these students with an informal visit to the university prior to the commencement of the programme. The students received a guided tour, had lunch together and then participated in an informal group discussion focused on their thoughts about this experience. The discussion gave insight into the depth of their feelings about their previous experiences of formal education. For many of them was the first point of contact these students had with any formal education since they left school, most of them at an early age and all of them with very negative

experiences of feeling incompetent, insecure and incomplete, having been given negative messages from previous teachers such as 'you're stupid', 'you're a waster', 'you'll amount to nothing'. Subsequently further informal visits were organised through a 'return to study' module that was devised in conjunction with PBNi officers especially for this cohort with the intention of helping to alleviate some of the expressed fears about formal education.

This highly sensitive study meant that the neutrality of the researcher was challenged to a great extent, as the researcher had to recognise that at times the information and views stated by students particularly with regard to their involvement in paramilitary activity did directly affect how the researcher felt and responded, albeit at times subtly relaying non verbal messages of distaste. This was due to the fact that the researcher had firsthand experience of actually living in this contested society and there was a distinct possibility of knowing the victims of some of the crimes committed. The researcher had to draw upon inherent Rogerian (1996) interpersonal skills of showing unconditional positive regard and empathy that would be the keypin to establishing and maintaining a relationship that also acknowledged the third Rogerian core condition of genuineness. This approach requires the researcher to 'enter the internal frame of reference' or as the Indian American proverb succinctly describes in this case, the researcher being able to 'walk two moons in their (students') moccasins' (Nelson-Jones, 2005:89). The scope of this paper does not lend itself to charting the full and subsequent impact this had on the formal education delivery, but it is nonetheless an important aspect to frame within the holistic learning journey of the student.

One of the very first modules offered on the Youth and Community Work programme was Interpersonal Skills. The design of this module is based upon Roger's (1996) model of creating a safe space, where participants process critical thinking of self. This is underpinned by the three core principles of unconditional positive regard, empathy and genuineness. These students were asked to bring their life histories of living in a contested society to a 'safe place' where they could re-examine their belief systems, that had in the not too distant past driven them to commit crimes, often in defence of these fiercely held beliefs. They were challenged to address what the research discovered as being a skilfully nurtured value system, based on a close-knit and largely homogenous family and community structure, that tended to pass on myths expounding the 'right' of one community, over the other. These learned behaviours and values were later reinforced in the wider community particularly where this group of individuals came into contact with paramilitary groups. The majority of these adult learners felt their crimes could be justified, for the sake of the 'cause' for which they were fighting. This programme aimed to, in the first instance, challenge their value-base and long-standing beliefs. The task of framing a critical reflection of self had to firstly tackle the problem of creating a 'safe environment', that encompassed Roger's (ibid) three core conditions of unconditional positive regard, empathy and genuineness, with individuals that had been polarised by living in a contested society. Interestingly the researcher found this process was helped by the fact that participants 'respected each other more because they understood what it was like to do time'.

One significant aspect that emerges from this is the importance of taking cognisance of the emotional aspects of biographical research with particular reference to this specialist group of political ex-prisoners who embarked upon a transformatory journey through higher education as a vehicle for their reintegration into society. This transformative learning experience requires the learner to make informed and reflective decisions to act, either immediately or to reaffirm an existing pattern of action. Mezirow's (1994) theory points to the learner acquiring communicative competence that will require the learner to examine their own purposes, values and meanings. As the learner becomes more critically reflective of assumptions, more free in their discourse with self and others and begins to take reflective action, they will achieve higher levels of communicative competence. Mezirow (ibid) explains belief as a '*habit that guides action*' and those beliefs are tested by any action that is guided by belief. He suggests that '*critical reflection on the belief assumptions will nurture transformed learning*', and that as the learner strives to seek agreement on the interpretation and belief he or she will examine the potential possibilities of those changes. Therefore, when transformative learning occurs, the learner deconstructs their meaning schemes and transforms them into new ones that guide future action.

By redefining the problem the learner engages in a process of reframing that requires a full critical exploration of self, and by examining their own frame of reference the learner engages in subjective reframing. An essential task of making available the environment where this can take place requires the tutor to adopt a Rogerian (1996) approach of '*providing a safe growth promoting climate*'. This frees up the adult learner to bring to the process their unique cultural and socio-political set of values and belief systems to test and to challenge each other through a constructivist process where they can interpret and reinterpret their experiential learning through critical reflection and rational discourse that informs decisions made towards future actions.

This investigation of how these students navigated their way through the academic and professional challenges they had to face as students was underpinned by their personal journey, which this paper contends is largely driven by their emotional self awareness and self regulation. Goleman (1997) outlines five characteristics that illustrate the impact of emotional intelligence on self: 1) knowing one's emotions (self awareness –recognising a feeling as it is happening), 2) managing emotions (the ability of handling feelings so they are appropriate, 3) motivating oneself (marshalling emotions in the service of a goal), 4) recognising emotions in others (empathy, social awareness) and 5) handling relationships (skill in managing motions in others). Although these have been reduced to four main aspects by Goleman, Boyatiz & McKee (2002) who have determined that the personal and social competence that recognises self awareness includes emotional self awareness, accurate assessment and self confidence and the social awareness of empathy, service orientation, and organisational awareness. This is very relevant to tracking the emotional influences that may have made a significant impact on the biographical research carried out with this group of adult learners as one of the principal methodological strategies used was through the use of reflective journals and life histories.

A number of instruments were used to help students reflect on their life histories, to help them make sense of their life choices and hopefully give them some direction in how to reframe and reconstruct their meaning schemes in order to begin to change some of the unconstructive aspects. This attempted to focus them on positive outcomes and learn how to make decisions based upon logical processing rationale rather than making negative reactionary impulsive choices. One such instrument used was Transactional Analysis (TA), which proved to be a very powerful mechanism. The skills and practical nature of TA provided a tool that leaned towards use of self rather than a theoretically based syllabus that might otherwise only begin to scratch the surface of helping these students to become more self aware. The key principles of TA permit the individual to engage in an exploratory study of their own ego system, that helps the individual to discover how they have learned particular mannerisms and made important decisions based upon learned behaviours of significant others from their parent, adult and child egos, during what is claimed by Berne (1973) and is now widely recognised, as occurring within the formative years of the person's life. These decisions are further reinforced through what TA explains as positive and negative stroking, where the individual seeks strokes either positive or negative in order to survive. When this particular cohort of students was confronted with this theory they responded from their individual and personal life-scripts. This study does not purport to place the reasoning for these students' subsequent life choices as firmly couched within their 'life-script' as this would be an over ambitious generalisation. However, there are a number of correlations that they as individuals can draw upon, and at the very least begin to make some sense of their life position in the present tense.

An example of this is the course curriculum that included an exercise in which each student completed their personal ²egogram. This provided a wealth of information that was discussed in an informal setting, thus allowing students to talk about their past experiences. In most cases these were difficult and painful reflections and a number of otherwise hidden memories and new understanding about the relationship between the individual and significant others emerged.³ In most cases these were not positive and in some extreme cases not healthy. When this occurred the individuals were faced with choices about whether to embrace revelations about themselves and critically reflect upon how this could be incorporated into a new meaning scheme or to disregard them. Alongside this technique students were introduced to 'self awareness'. The Interpersonal Skills module included self-awareness exercises, supported by journaling, based on Boud's (1987) model of critical reflective practice. This research discovered that once the adult learners had been given the opportunity to participate in a specifically designed programme aimed to make the participants feel safe and

² Eric Berne: Egogram is where the individual charts their reaction to how they respond to a set of emotive statements under the three heading behaviour feelings action determining which of the ego states these fit and scoring appropriately to determine which ego state they lean most towards.

³ It is important to point out that each student also had access to a professional counsellor and a psychologist provided by (PBNi) so any issues that were unhealthy could be processed further

free enough to lay down their value laden attitudes and begin to actively listen and critically think about what others from diverse backgrounds had to say, they began to show signs of travelling on the transformatory learning journey. These signs were manifested in some of the students demonstrating their ability to successfully complete 39 core competencies that were standardised professional practice milestones determined by the National Youth Agency professional endorsement body.

They were also exposed to external agencies through an Agency placement outside of Northern Ireland for 12 weeks that took them out of their comfort zone. The support given to these students up to this point was more than any other students experienced in similar community youth work training programmes. The university operated a support system for students going on placement abroad, with experienced tutors who organised placements on behalf of the university in such places as Chicago, USA and Durban, South Africa, providing support to students on these placements. PBNi students were offered this in keeping with equitable practice across all cohorts in the university community youth work programmes. However, there were major problems with this particular cohort due to passport and visa restrictions being placed upon them. As an alternative, a few of the students opted for placements in London and Dublin. For two of the students this proved to be very problematic. One student who began his placement was reported to be self harming and had erratic attendance and after the third week he had disappeared completely. When he was eventually found, the extent of his self inflicted injuries was so severe he had to be hospitalised. Another student went on placement in a Christian drug rehabilitation centre and within the first three weeks, began threatening a work colleague. The course director had to intervene and immediately travelled to the placement to help resolve the problem. This serves to also highlight the role played by the course director as 'manager' to the placement agency and as 'adult educator' to the student where she spent over a week with the student processing the incident and helping him redefine and move forward with a new understanding.

During the programme, students were also asked to write about their personal journey. The seismic shift that occurred throughout the transformatory learning process is captured in the following quotes from some of the participants reflecting back on their journey: 'I feel a lack of confidence in academic ability'... 'I left school at 14, I hated it and I am scared of this course''I don't know why I am here I suppose I was told I had to be here'...'I want to get a qualification to help me get a job' and at then at the end of the programme: 'I feel this course has been very important and worthwhile for my own personal growth as a person which I feel will play a significant role in how I work'... Another participant stated: This was something I wanted to do for a while...I am delighted to be part of it and it is all I expected to be. However I am having a little difficulty in fulfilling all my commitments'. The following statement captures the excitement of achievement and more importantly the reinforcement of that achievement from significant others in this participant's life: 'I am doing things I never dared hope I'd be doing despite sometimes feeling under pressure...my self esteem has gone through the roof and my family and friends are dead proud of what I'm achieving'.

The students were asked to comment on their professional journey and their level of involvement in work tasks in relation to their knowledge. All replied they felt they were capable of carrying out the tasks. One said that: 'at the start I did not feel my involvement was of equal status, but now I have more involvement and I think this is a learning process and I am adapting quite well'. Another student stated: 'I feel I am up to par', and another student confidently responded by stating: 'I feel I am capable of doing the work'. The students expressed the importance of 'fitting in' at the workplace, 'I felt I fitted in right away. I was fully accepted by my colleagues who made my job easier and have never been made to feel unwelcome or out of place. I have a job to do and I am encouraged and supported in all aspects and areas by my colleagues'. Another participant stated that experience was 'like a family in many ways, they welcomed me with open arms'. Not all students have had completely positive experiences; one student commented: 'I have been made welcome in my office but not in others', and yet another stated 'yes I feel welcomed in the service but because of the changes in the service, I feel there is discontent among the staff'. In general, students at the beginning of this programme had low self esteem and found it difficult to engage with others who they viewed as different, qualified, and professional and having greater authority or power than themselves.

Students were then asked to write about their academic experience. One respondent expressed the feeling that the course was very important to his/her personal growth: 'I feel this course has been very important and worthwhile for my own personal growth as a person which I feel will play a significant role in how I work'. Another student commented that this was a great opportunity to fulfil a long time goal and explains the expectations that have been placed upon the professional, academic and personal aspects: 'University of Ulster expects a lot of me as does my work and managers and last but not least my family I have had to struggle but I will settle it's just a big adjustment to overcome'. However one student gave a very honest account of how they were feeling about the whole experience: 'This is a course that I never wanted to do and from the day that I have started I have been very unhappy. I have had many good experiences during my time on the course but when putting my cards on the table there have been a lot of bad times which actually outweigh the good times'.

As stated earlier, for many of these students, formal education ended abruptly. An example of this is identified by one student who said he left school at the age of 14 with no formal qualifications. He goes on to reveal that he hardly ever attended school. During those formative adolescent years this did not create major problems as he relates that he 'got by'. This, he recalls, was due to the fact that he was recruited at a very early age into the loyalist paramilitary group who 'cared less about his educational achievement and more about him doing what he was told'. This student's distinct learning difficulties only emerged over the time he spent in prison for killing another man. He described the act of killing in detail to the researcher, concluding: 'looking out my prison window onto the streets below one night I could actually see my mates drinking and carrying on and I wondered why I was inside and they were out and free'. This was a life changing moment as the student describes a journey of self exploration and his imminent conversion to Christianity as the 'way to freedom'.

He explains this was a long road that brought him to the realisation that the decisions and actions he had previously taken were wrong. His first thoughts upon realising the mistakes he made were, he recalls, to tell other young men who perhaps found themselves in a similar position to himself to change their ways. 'This scheme gives me the perfect chance get to young people and tell them the other side of the story, the side of prison that is no picnic as I know what it's like to be there'.

One of most important aspects has been the experience these students had of working in the community: 'the work is very relevant to the kind of work I want to be involved in the future' and another who stated the importance of the experience of actually working within a project and being given some autonomy. A number of the students stated that their self-esteem and confidence was definitely increased due to this particular experience.

Conclusion

The research has clearly identified that whenever one engages in biographical research with adult learners, there is an extremely high risk of opening a 'Pandora's Box' that unleashes a sea of emotions, both from the participant and from the researcher. There is an inherent danger of leading the research into uncharted waters were the researcher cannot navigate a safe route out. The researcher must be aware of the possibilities of unearthing the 'hidden self' that evokes negative emotional responses, perhaps unintentionally lancing old wounds, summoning up old memories that have lain dormant. This worse case scenario can lead to a state of maladjustment for either or both parties involved in the research. The researcher using this approach is placing themselves in a very vulnerable position and should have professional experts on hand to consult with and refer participants.

This paper highlights the fact that biographical research cannot ignore the emotional influences of the participant or the researcher and this is especially evident in a contested society that has helped shape their values and belief systems. The research contends that these belief systems are in need of constructivist theorising to assist with coherent critical reflection that will hopefully contribute to reformulating meaning schemes. The research further contends that this can occur within a formal learning environment and that giving the right conditions of providing a growth-promoting safe learning environment that is free enough to allow the learner to engage in life-scripting, critical reflection and dialogue, provides all the ingredients for the student to engage in transformational learning.

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21. LEARNER IDENTITY AND THE PERPETUATION OF EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

Barbara McCabe

Background to the research

Tullycarnet has been targeted by government policy pursuing the agenda of Neighbourhood Renewal and in that context the local area Partnership sponsored research to be conducted in the area. Of particular interest was the fact that figures showed that the majority of children from the area were not being sent to the local primary school by parents. Although the local school was still the largest provider, other schools in the vicinity seemed to be attracting more and more pupils so that by the time the research began (early 2008) less than 100 pupils were attending a school with a capacity of more than 550. Part of the reduction can be accounted for by the demographic downturn –a much wider experience across Northern Ireland and beyond, but increasing numbers of pupils were also attending other neighbouring schools (and in a few cases were travelling considerable distances to attend primary school).

Aims of the research

The main aim of this research was to discover from parents living in the Tullycarnet area, the choices that they make for their children's education and the reasons for these choices. In particular, it was decided that the key focus would be on primary school choices, although information on other pre-school and post-primary children was gathered from families that had children at different stages. One reason why this has been of interest is the position of Tullycarnet Primary School. Despite having capacity for 550 pupils and possible enrolment per year group of nearly 80, the school has, for some years been accepting approximately 10 children each year. This has led to much reduced numbers of pupils which in turn may call into question the long-term future of the school. Indeed one of the issues to be tested by the research has been the impact of rumours of the school's possible closure on parents' decision-making.

Whilst Tullycarnet PS is the chief provider of primary education in the area, a majority of children living in Tullycarnet attend other schools. The second main provider is Gilnahirk Primary School, which is situated on the edge of the Tullycarnet area. They have slightly fewer children drawn from Tullycarnet but between them, these two schools provide primary education for the vast majority of children living in the area –a number of other schools provide places for small numbers of children and could be described as being in the broader Outer East Belfast area. Gilnahirk PS is located in a neighbouring area which is characterised as enjoying high levels of affluence. Therefore, another focus

for the research was to discover whether parents, in choosing Gilnahirk PS, were opting for a more 'middle class', 'achieving', or 'pushy' education for their children. In other words was it an active choice for aspirant parents? In addition parents were asked about their own experiences of education, including schools attended and outcomes to examine whether patterns of decision-making could be understood in relation to parents' own experiences.

Methodology

Figures were available for the relevant academic year (2007-08) from the Department of Education which identified how many children living in the Tullycarnet area were attending which schools. This gave the researcher an indication of which schools to approach –as many families as possible were hoped to be included in the study. Schools assisted in the identification of parents and visits to Open Days, Sports Days and Summer Schemes allowed the researcher to make informal contact with parents and to request interviews. Virtually all parents approached agreed to take part and there was a high success rate of contacts leading to interviews.

A questionnaire with mainly quantitative questions was used, although a number of opportunities were available for parents to corroborate their responses with qualitative reflections and additional answers. The questionnaire was split into a number of sections and all were administered personally by the researchers. One early section of questions asked parents about their own experiences of school – the purpose for asking this was to attempt to identify parents who, as long term residents of the area, had themselves attended local schools and whether their responses showed any particular patterns of decision-making. It was hoped to identify whether parents' positive or negative experiences of school fed into their decision-making and whether there was any pattern which showed parents actively picking the school, or avoiding the school they had attended themselves. The vast majority of parents were long-term residents of the Tullycarnet area and had attended the local primary school and the majority had then attended a local non-selective post-primary school.

Tullycarnet and surrounding areas

Tullycarnet is a large housing estate dating from the early 1970s located on the outskirts of east Belfast. The administrative area of Tullycarnet Ward is located in Castlereagh Local Government District and Belfast East Parliamentary constituency. An examination of the statistics available from the Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) tell us that Tullycarnet is an area defined as experiencing a high degree of multiple deprivation and it falls into the policy arena of Neighbourhood Renewal (covering the bottom 10% of wards) –the only area in Castlereagh so designated. In addition to Tullycarnet being identified as an area of considerable social and economic deprivation, it is bordered by three wards which enjoy considerably better circumstances– Cherryvalley, Gilnahirk and Ballyhanwood. All four areas are overwhelmingly Protestant, ranging from 85.1% (Cherryvalley) to 93.3% (Tullycarnet).

In terms of life expectancy, the median age at death in 2006 was 79 years for Northern Ireland as a whole, compared to 73 for Tullycarnet and 82 for –neighbouring– Gilnahirk. On a whole range of social and economic indicators Tullycarnet stands out in comparison with the three surrounding areas in terms of its deprivation. For example on a scale of 583 wards across Northern Ireland where 1 is most deprived, Tullycarnet stands at 71, compared to Cherryvalley at 496, Ballyhanwood at 544 and Gilnahirk at 576 (one of the least deprived wards in Northern Ireland).

Figures from 2004 indicate that 66% of children born in Tullycarnet are born to unmarried mothers compared to 24% in Cherryvalley, 17.6% in Gilnahirk and 15.8% for Ballyhanwood. In addition the percentage of lone parent households with dependent children follows a similar pattern with 17.5% of households in Tullycarnet being lone parent households compared to 4% for Cherryvalley, 1.8% for Gilnahirk and 3.6% for Ballyhanwood.

Reliance on benefits also indicate high levels of income deprivation in Tullycarnet compared to neighbouring areas, as do availability of employee jobs and housing tenure.

	Tullycarnet	Cherryvalley	Gilnahirk	Ballyhanwood
Income support	17.2%	3.7%	2.3%	2.1%
Incapacity benefit	13.5%	5.1%	4.8%	5.4%
Housing benefit	19.0%	4.0%	0.9%	1.9%
Unemployed	5.6%	1.8%	1.5%	1.9%
% long-term unemployed	39%	26%	28%	30.4%
Employee jobs	54	1762	504	420
Owner occupied	48.9%	81.1%	94.2%	90.9%
Access to car/van	58.3%	81.5%	87.9%	90.8%

However, it is in relation to education indicators that Tullycarnet emerged as one of the most deprived wards in Northern Ireland standing at 9 out of 583. This follows a well-established pattern of educational underachievement in Protestant working class communities in Northern Ireland in general and Belfast in particular.

	Tullycarnet	Cherryvalley	Gilnahirk	Ballyhanwood
Education domain deprivation	9	276	566	539
Degree or higher	5.6%	30.5%	29.0%	21.3%
School leavers going on to higher education	7.7%	51.9%	60.0%	54.3%
5 GCSEs A-C	30.8%	76.6%	80.0%	89.1%
Free School Meals	35.0%	4.8%	1.5%	1.1%

These figures demonstrate that it is not simply a matter of deprivation figures that should be of interest, but the impact of experiencing relative deprivation, compared to neighbouring areas is also important. Relative poverty is said to have a considerably negative impact on the mental health, well-being and self-esteem of people.

Findings

There has been a long-standing parenting project based in the local primary school which involves a number of parents during term time, offering a range of adult education provision from parenting classes, to GCSE maths and English to card-making, flower-arranging and healthy eating as well as school holiday activities such as Summer Schemes. Provision also includes work aimed at involving fathers –this includes outings to local events and entertainment establishments for fathers and their children. This aims to encourage fathers to become more engaged in what can often be seen as a highly feminised environment.

This project follows a popular premise which leads to a focus on the role of patterns of parenting in influencing educational outcomes for children. Much of this falls into the ‘deficit’ view that failure to thrive in a school setting is a problem to be overcome by pupil and parents (with the help of teachers). Deficits may include parental educational underachievement, a lack of literacy and numeracy skills among parents, a lack of interest or commitment to children’s educational careers, failure to recognise the value of education and its role in providing routes out of poverty or the ‘poverty of aspiration’. One of the outcomes of this thinking is that the problems are understood to be largely ‘individual’ and therefore the responses and solutions are seen as largely individual as well – hence parenting and educational programmes aimed at making parents ‘fit for purpose’ in education terms.

Why did parents pick the schools they picked?

Parents were asked to identify how important they felt it was that a school had a good reputation in relation to a number of issues, including good results, bullying and relationship between teachers and parents and pupils. All parents were likely to describe the issues as Quite Important or Very Important. Parents of children at Gilnahirk PS are most likely to describe the school as having a better reputation than other schools in the area. Parents of children at Tullycarnet PS were more likely than other parents to describe the school as having a worse reputation than others in the area. However, several of the respondents stated that they were aware that these views were locally popular, but they felt they were unfair. Others suggested that some people were reflecting on past experience and that they were not necessarily aware of recent improvements and extras that the school could offer nowadays. Parents of children at the other, more minor, providers were most likely to describe their school as having about the same reputation as other schools in the area.

When asked about their personal experience of the particular school their children attended the responses were overwhelmingly positive. Parents were unlikely to describe negative aspects of the school. However, one area in which parents of children at Gilnahirk differed from other parents was that they were much more likely to argue that wealthy children/families were treated differently. This was supported by a number of comments, reflecting that the children of parents involved in the school, either by working there or by being involved in the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) were more likely to be teachers' favourites or would be picked for special treatment such as roles in school plays. This may be because the school, given its location, has a wider social mix of pupils and the Tullycarnet parents involved with this school are much more likely to encounter affluent parents –making social and economic differences more obvious, stark and 'experienced'.

This raises the question of whether mixing with middle class children enhances or undermines the self-esteem of working class children –and whose responsibility it is to manage this? It was also clear that where a parent had an apparent grievance relating to one issue, they had a tendency to register negative comments across the board. These generally negative views were not confined to any particular school. Parents were asked their reasons for picking a school for their children and there were clear patterns of responses.

The parents that sent their children to Tullycarnet PS were overwhelmingly likely to cite locality as their most important reason, in fact 73% cited these 'local' reasons. Some people added to this by saying that they thought it was important to support the local school or that it was important to go to the local school as an aspect of supporting 'community'. A small number of people also cited what might be described as a 'passive' reason such as 'it did me no harm' or 'if they're going to learn, they'll learn'.

The main reason stated for picking Gilnahirk was the school's reputation for delivering a good education and/or good results (80%). A small number were influenced by rumours of the potential closure of Tullycarnet and wanted to avoid disruption to their children's education. However, it is interesting to note that of the small number of local parents who had themselves attended Gilnahirk, none had gone on to selective schools. Today very few Tullycarnet children who had attended Gilnahirk and who had moved on to post-primary school were attending selective schools. This raises the question of whether children from the Tullycarnet area, even if they attend a 'high achieving school', achieve as much as other children from more affluent areas and backgrounds. Or is it that other aspects of disadvantage play an important role in the education outcomes of children from this area.

Parents who sent their children to other providers in the general vicinity of Tullycarnet cited a wide range of reasons, with no reason predominant. It was interesting to note, though, that several parents cited 'local', not necessarily local to them but perhaps to grandparents or childminders. It also reflected a certain amount of movement so that the school picked was 'local' at the time but the family had since moved and the children were kept at the original

school. The range of reasons are also reminiscent of an almost 'consumer' approach –such as Open Day, ethos and facilities, teachers and feedback from other people. A significant proportion of these parents were also from outside the area originally, suggesting that less historic attachment to the area may lead to people taking a wider view of their options. Their wider range of reasons for choosing the school they chose and their 'consumer' approach may also reflect this lack of local attachment and 'identity'.

When asked how important it was that children attend a local school, the parents of Tullycarnet (80%) and Gilnahirk (95%) pupils stated it was important or very important. This might be expected since both schools are in the immediate area –Tullycarnet in the middle of the area and Gilnahirk on the edge (and therefore close for parents living in that part of the estate). Parents of children attending other schools were more split, with the majority (56%) still stating 'local' as important but almost as many saying it was not very important.

A clear majority of all parents stated that the 'extras that schools can offer' –such as breakfast clubs, homework clubs, after schools' activities– are important or very important (Tullycarnet: 100%, Gilnahirk: 74%, Others: 81%). A small number of Gilnahirk and Other parents thought it not very important. When asked about the physical environment –the state of buildings and the 'look' of the place, there was a much more mixed set of responses from all parents and in relation to all schools, with only a slight majority of parents stating it was important or very important. A number of parents had moved their children between schools and when this occurred it tended to be for one of two reasons –to get away from bullying or to move towards better (or perceived better) SEN provision. There was no particular pattern to this movement– no single school was being moved away from or to. Parents who described SEN as relevant to them also exhibited a high degree of stress, confusion, isolation and feeling like they were 'in the dark'. They didn't know what they were entitled to or what they could ask for or who they could ask. As a group they exhibited the highest degree of 'powerlessness'.

Parents, their recent educational experiences and their views

Because of the presence of a long-standing family project located in Tullycarnet PS, it was important to identify potential differences in approach from the parents involved in this project, compared to parents not involved. Respondents could be broken into three distinct groups in this respect. The largest group could be described as indicating no recent involvement in education or training. The smallest group consisted of parents who are involved with the family project and associated learning programmes. The third group consists of parents who have had recent experiences of education of unspecified or non-family project origins.

Of the parents with no recent education or training, they were more likely to have children at Gilnahirk PS (42%) and all but one cited good reputation as

the reason for choosing the school. However, two thirds of these parents were tentative about what school their children might transfer to after primary school; if they did have a preference it was most likely to be for a selective (grammar) school. Only one parent had an older child already attending a selective school. Most Tullycarnet parents with no recent education or training (32% of total) had children already at post-primary school or had opinions about which post-primary school they wanted their children to attend. None included selective schools in their responses. The parents with children attending other schools (26%) were more likely to cite non-selective schools, though almost as many indicated selective schools.

Parents who had attended recent non-family project learning were also more likely to have children attending Gilnahirk PS (47%) compared to Tullycarnet (18%) and others (35%). However, of the Gilnahirk parents who had children already in post-primary school, none were in selective schools and only one had suggested a selective school as a future prospect. Almost half had no preference as to future choice of post-primary school as yet. None of the Tullycarnet parents in this category had children at selective schools or were aiming for them to attend selective schools in the future. A small number of parents of children in other schools had children at, or were aiming to attend, selective schools.

Parents involved in the family project were most likely to send their children to Tullycarnet PS (also the location of the project), suggesting that whatever else the outcomes of the parenting project, it encouraged a degree of loyalty or interest in Tullycarnet PS. However no post-primary children in this category were attending selective schools and few parents indicated an aim for future attendance of a selective school.

Parents own educational background

The vast majority of parents involved in the study left school at 16 years of age (Tullycarnet – 73%, Gilnahirk – 63% and others – 80%). In the case of each category, more than two thirds were in households which contained two adults (Tullycarnet – 73%, Gilnahirk – 68% and others – 69%). The age profile of parents were somewhat different – the youngest average age for first child was 20.6 years for Tullycarnet parents, 23 years for Gilnahirk parents and 24 years for other parents. However this masks a significant difference in age ranges with Tullycarnet being by far the youngest (first child born at 15 – 25 years) compared to Gilnahirk (16 – 39 years) and others (17 – 33 years). The most popular age for a first child was 22 years of age.

Approximately 10% of parents stated that they had stayed on at school after GCSEs but only half of them completed their A Level courses (leaving exams for 18 year olds). None who had completed A Levels successfully continued into higher education and each commented that they felt they had not been pushed to reach their full potential when at school. The other half did not complete their A Level courses and several cited their reason for leaving as ‘not fitting in’, one

stated that their friends had all left after GCSEs and the sixth form was very 'cliquey' and 'bitchy'. Two other parents had achieved university degrees, but as 'adult returners' rather than school-leavers.

One very obvious change in terms of choosing schools after primary can be seen when comparing the schools attended by parents who grew up in the area with the schools their children now attend (or that they wish them to attend). Looking only at parents who grew up in the Tullycarnet area, 67% attended Dundonald High School. Today a much wider range of post-primary, non-selective, schools were mentioned (though figures gathered cannot be seen as reliable as only those families with primary school-aged children were giving information regarding post-primary aged siblings).

When parents were asked about their positive and negative memories of school the most common 'positive' memory was friends and the most common negative was bullying. A small number of people admitted to having been a bully and on reflection now thought that they should have been stopped. It was interesting to note that none of the parents responded to these questions in relation to educational outcomes. There was a strong tendency to identify and prioritise the social benefits that could be derived from school (as well as the social problems, for example bullying) rather than any educational benefits. This raises questions for schools and their 'mission'. However social benefits or outcomes cannot be overlooked or underestimated.

Schools are well placed to encourage the development of social capital, particularly bonding social capital. Responses from parents regarding their own educational experiences would seem to reinforce this. It is perhaps understandable that social outcomes, good circles of supportive friends 'in the same boat' would be prioritised in an area of high levels of social and economic deprivation. The significance of such a support network for future adult life in an area with such levels of deprivation needs to be considered and is a good example of bonding social capital. Research has shown that social capital may not be diminished by the presence of violent conflict but the nature of its manifestation can change (undermining bridging and reinforcing bonding social capital). The existence of over thirty years of low-intensity violent ethnic conflict cannot be ignored as a factor in this phenomenon.

These findings reflect quite neatly the writings on social capital that suggest that in communities 'under threat', the need for local mutual support from in-group members is of crucial importance –in order to feel safe, supported and sustained (even if it is at the expense of more profitable 'outward-looking' bridging and linking capital). (Colletta and Cullen 2000) However, it should be noted that the highly segregated schools of Northern Ireland, which divide young people in terms of religion, class, geography and often gender are extremely un-diverse institutions and not reflective of wider Northern Ireland society. They are, therefore, poorly placed to encourage the development of bridging social capital. Thus the education divide, which is so emblematic of the education system, underwrites Northern Ireland's wide and deep societal divides.

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22. PARTICIPATION IN LIFELONG LEARNING AND IDENTITY OF ROMA WOMEN

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Introduction

This chapter presents the interconnection between the changes and development of the Roma women identity and their participation in lifelong learning. Roma people are spread around the world. Today there are an estimated 12 million Roma people in Europe, America and some areas of Asia, Africa and Oceania. Before the enlargement of the European Union with the Eastern countries, Spain was the country in the European Union with the highest number of Roma people. According to the Ministry for Employment and Social Affairs it varies between 600,000 and 650,000 people, a 1.5% of the entire Spanish population. The Roma people have been historically excluded and have had to fight against existing stereotypes, and against racist and xenophobic attitudes that has placed them in marginalised situations (MTAS, 2006).

The research and experiences on participation in lifelong learning and identity of Roma women have been framed within the context of the information society. We can distinguish between two phases of social changes. In a first phase, between 1975 and 1995, there was a social development completely based on the unequal access to information with new exclusionary processes such as the digital gap. From the late 90s a second phase of transformations developed an ongoing democratisation of the social structure (Flecha, Gómez & Puigvert, 2003). Increasingly there are targeted efforts to transform situations of exclusion by means of participation and inclusion of all the voices. In all these transformations, the main role of selection and processing of information as a point of reference is a common element.

Neither the labour market nor education is disconnected to this process. People who can access information and received an education that allows them to manage that information efficiently are more likely to have better employment. In fact, the transformation of the occupational structure is determined by the growth of the social groups with higher education (Castells, Flecha, Freire, Giroux, Macedo, Willis, 1999). Therefore, people with less academic credentials are relegated to do more mechanical jobs while the ones that completed a higher education achieve creative and better-rewarded positions.

To carry out the analysis of the interconnections between the changes and development of the Roma women identity and their participation in lifelong learning, we reviewed research projects and educational experiences, theory and practice. First, we briefly analyse the false myths on education that the Roma community suffers. Second, we reviewed several research projects focused on the Roma community. Finally, we describe an educational experience from and for Roma women.

False myths on education by the Roma community

Gomez and Vargas (2003) explain that ‘despite international efforts to make access to education a universal reality, access still remains a challenge for Roma families’. They also argue that Roma families have rallied against their children’s acceptance in schools, Romani students have been tracked into special education programmes on the basis of their ethnicity and socioeconomic conditions. Gomez and Vargas state that in Europe illiteracy rates among Roma students is high. This fact is strongly connected to issues of quality of life, income, social participation and the lack of other opportunities for the Roma community. These authors point out that overall these precedents result in low Roma participation in higher education.

These are several situations which the Roma community find themselves in whereby they have to defend and fight for the prevailing of their rights as any other citizen to the access to an education of quality. Social reproduction theorists undertake research that further excludes the Roma community, concluding among other ideas that Roma people do not like school by nature, or that not attending school is a cultural practice just as much as that Roma people are violent and thieves by nature, among others.

Besides over the years, research conducted on the Roma community has been developed without taking into account their voices in the research processes. In many cases, since there was no input on the research results by the Roma community, the conclusions and debates were build on false statements and arguments. Furthermore these situations have only provoked additional social exclusion of the Roma community. The individuals and communities living in this situation of exclusion frequently do not agree to participate in research for the university since on many occasions they have seen how university researchers conduct research on them without taking into account their opinions and not doing research with the aim to improve their situation of exclusion. That is, many researchers collaborate with the group being studied only for gathering information and then develop conclusions on their own without informing the research participants or informing them about the results.

Research projects with Roma Women connecting their educational success to their identity

We have reviewed three research projects conducted with Roma women on three topics: a) Roma women and the labour market in the frame of the Calli Butipen project (Valls, 2003); b) Roma women and education in the frame of the Brudila Calli project (Payà, 2000); and c) Roma women and participation in associations in the frame of the Mestipen Romi project (Elboj, 2004).

These research projects conducted for and with Roma women aim to define strategies that contribute to the overcoming of social, labour and educational exclusion of Romani women in Spain and learn their interests for social participation. For example, as mentioned before the Calli Butipen project (Valls, 2003) is centred on the study of the situation of Romani women and the

implications of school participation (and school drop-out and failure) for their labour opportunities. The Brudila Calli project (Payà, 2000) was born from the need to find solutions to the school failure and absenteeism of Roma girls and adolescents as a mechanism to overcome social and economic exclusion as well. In the same sense, the Mestipen Romi project (Elboj, 2004) identified the needs and interests of Romani women as the starting point to promote their participation in the associations movement. These projects were conducted by CREA, Centre of Research in Theories and Practices that Overcome Inequalities, at the University of Barcelona in collaboration with Roma associations and organisations.

The research projects presented, in this paper, were conducted under a critical communicative approach in order to always include the voices of Romani women. The communicative methodology responds not only to the recent dialogic turn (Gómez & Latorre, 2005) previously described but also to the Romani demand of a major participation in the processes of generating knowledge about them. Due to this methodology, it has been possible to establish a direct connection between research and policy developments that respond directly to the Roma needs.

Two postulates stand out in the critical communicative methodology. First, it is a dialogic methodology in which all voices are included in the research process. It contrasts existing knowledge about the topic of research in the scientific community with the interpretations of social actors, thus overcoming the methodological gap between researchers and researched as stated by Habermas (1984). Second, it is a practical and transformational methodology. It focuses not only on the analysis of social exclusion, but also analyses practices and realities that overcome gender, ethnic or socio economic inequalities.

The three research projects presented in this paper have had an Advisory Council. The inclusion of an Advisory Council in the research projects is a key element of the research with cultural minorities and groups at risk of social exclusion as indicated by research projects of scientific excellence such as the Workaló project¹ (2001-2004) and the Includ-ed project² (2006-2011) which is an integrated project.

Both the European scientific community and the Spanish scientific community have recognised that the inclusion of an Advisory Council in the research increases the quality of the research, the truthfulness of the analysis and the social utility of the results. The Advisory Council is composed by individuals belonging to the group which is being investigated, in this case Roma women.

¹ The Workaló project full title is Workaló. The creation of new occupational patters for cultural minorities: the Gypsy case, and it has been a research project of reference in the study of cultural minorities from the 5th Framework Programme.

² The Includ-ed project is titled INCLUD-ED. Strategies for inclusion and social cohesion in Europe from education, and it is an Integrated Project of the priority 7 of the VI Framework Programme of the European Commission. Integrated Projects integrate together the critical mass of activities and resources needed to achieve ambitious clearly defined scientific objectives and are expected to have a structuring effect on the fabric of European research. The Includ-ed project was the only project focused on compulsory education which was selected in the last Calls for Proposals of the 6th Framework Programme.

The Advisory Council has the aim to give the opportunity to the participants to actively participate in the development of the project. The tasks of this decision-making body are to contribute with knowledge, review documents and provide guidance on the development of the project, control so that the project develops taking into account all the voices and evaluating the research process and conclusions, as well as that the results contribute to transform the reality of the target groups. The role of the Advisory Council is an active role in dialogue with the research team. It is not a merely consultative group but a key element that participates in the different steps of the research.

Traditionally the spaces that shape the public sphere have been filled by people of the mainstream culture and not taking into account the participation in those of the Roma community. This lack of representation is due, to a large extent, to the barriers that this community faces when trying to access them. This fact is especially important in the case of educational opportunities and the implications for the labour market, since these are spaces that include the possibility of social promotion.

Calli Butipen project

The data on employment and unemployment rates regarding the Roma community reflects an important problem of exclusion from the labour market. In the case of Roma women, we may say that they have suffered throughout history from a triple discrimination: a) for being women, for being Roma and for not having academic studies (not having a university degree). It is with the aim to overcome these inequalities that research such as the following appears at both national and European level. In this context, the Calli Butipen research project (Valls, 2003) studies how to contribute to the overcoming of the social exclusion in which many Roma women find themselves by means of scientific contributions in addition to the actions and policies directed towards their inclusion in the labour market.

In this project two elements in relation to education have especial interest. In the first place it has to be taken into account the role of the Roma women within the family in relation to education. Roma women dedicate time and efforts to overcome the situation of exclusion that their children suffer due to absenteeism and school failure. Second, this project takes into account the abilities and experiences that Roma women have developed over their lifetimes and the need for those elements to be recognised as transformative elements of social inequalities. Therefore, by means of this project, understanding and analysing these abilities and capabilities of Roma women allows them to legitimise their possibilities of social development overcoming the social stigmatisation that the Roma culture suffer. This project explains that an equal access to the labour market will occur by means of lifelong learning actions targeted to Roma women and their families.

For a better opportunity of labour inclusion it is necessary to have an academic education as one of the requirements of the context of the information society in which we live. Often the institutions of education have been developed without taking into account the Roma culture, for that reason many Roma families do

not feel identified with it. On the other hand, in order to ensure the success of future generations, it is important to improve the academic trajectories of Roma children making the necessary changes in the school. To suggest a few, these changes may imply conducting a pedagogy of maximums, making visible the Roma culture in the centre and the curriculum, promoting a democratic and participatory school, having positive expectations and faculty commitment in the education of Roma children. These changes should also be taken into account in relation to adult education organisations and schools by promoting a democratic model of adult education in which the actions and activities start from the interests and needs of the learners and in which there are the necessary means to offer adult education to Roma people who want to learn in that centre.

The most common barriers that Roma women face when trying to get involved in the labour market are the selection processes. In this case, besides the lack of academic qualifications, this project highlights other barriers such as the lack of recognition of abilities developed in different spaces. On the one hand, it is important for the people responsible to conducting such processes to take into account the different means to acquire abilities for a job place and for that reason the promotion of accreditation of prior experiential knowledge and learning is also needed. Concurrently some training should be facilitated to Roma women on how to highlight in interviews and other written documents, such as the curriculum vitae, their knowledge, skills and abilities. The education for Roma women should be conceived as a lifelong process in order to help to meet the requirements of the information society and to take part in the changes within society. This will not only help the labour inclusion but will increase the number of possibilities to which Roma women will have access. Therefore adult education should not only have the aim of labour inclusion for Roma women but to help recycle their knowledge.

Besides, barriers in the selection process are a result of stereotypes and prejudices about the Roma community. A greater knowledge on the Roma culture would break this negative image. On many occasions Roma women have had low expectations when applying for a job since they have experienced repeatedly negative experiences in the process and the examples of successful stories of Roma women with academic background and a job in the labour market are scarcely disseminated. It is for that reason that is necessary to explain and publish role models that are opening spaces and occupying positions from which Roma women have traditionally been excluded. By means of creating these models to follow will help overcome and break the stereotypes that reduce the possibilities of Roma women and keep all the community in a situation of social exclusion.

Brudila Calli project

One of the main results of the Brudila Calli study (Payà, 2000) is that Romani women have many skills and knowledge which are useful for the current labour market. They have a strong learning capacity that they develop within their social, family and informal labour market context, but there is no recognition of this capacity. They face strong social barriers. A main exclusionary element is education: regardless of their capacity there is a high level of school failure.

However, this study found that Romani women are highly aware of the importance of education and they are currently working to overcome these barriers. We will hereafter focus on these educational aspects of this study.

In terms of educational aspects, Romani women involved in this research project highlight the following elements as barriers that difficult (or hinder) their participation in the school system:

- discrimination
- prejudices and stereotypes
- low expectations of educational success
- fear of losing their cultural traditions
- lack of answers from the faculty at schools
- ignorance of the Roma culture
- family responsibilities
- unfavourable economic situations
- scarce positive role models
- scant identification with the educational institution

This project reveals with regards to the educational system that absenteeism and school failure are factors that negatively influence the Roma community educational path. The fact that the Roma culture is not included in the school curriculum and the little knowledge that teachers demonstrate of their culture are aspects that provokes a perception of the school as a strange institution to the Roma community.

The fieldwork of this project demonstrates that nowadays Romani women are fully aware of the importance that their children's education has for their future access to the labour market, social inclusion and for being able to hold positions of responsibility. Romani women claim that the schools need to include elements of their culture so that it will be more meaningful for their children. This meaning creation process comes from the involvement of the Roma family in the school of the girl or boy. School has to become a place, as said before, where Roma children find elements from their culture, as well as pedagogies that reinforce their involvement and participation in the different school activities. Again, the results obtained in the above research projects demonstrate the importance of the school access for Roma children in order to overcome cultural and social inequalities that they find in our society as part of a community traditionally excluded.

These practices are a path to change the exclusion circle by improving the academic results in the school, which is a requirement to obtain more resources and allow the Roma to access the labour market with better conditions, and in a more egalitarian situation with the non-Roma individuals.

Romani women fight for a greater equality, but not for losing their identity. It is for that reason that it is necessary to promote intercultural dialogue and support the creation of spaces of reflection. In addition, Romani women also fight for the equality of differences (Flecha, 2000), which in this case is to become more present in higher education, as well as to promote from the academic field the knowledge of the Romani women identity.

Mestipen Romi project

The Mestipen Romi project (Elboj, 2004) defends the assertion that Roma women are developing experiences that contribute to the overcoming of barriers that difficult or hinder their participation in the associations movement and as a consequence their access to educational, social and cultural activities in non formal spaces. Promoting the social participation of Roma women favours in general the social participation of the Roma community. The aim of this project was to identify the needs and interests of Roma women as a starting point to promote their participation in the associations' movement.

The participation of Roma women in the project among others was in the planning of the fieldwork but also by means of the Advisory Council of Roma women. This council had the aim to guarantee the involvement of Roma women's voices and looking after the implementation and results, in order for those to reflect the needs and opinions expressed by all the participating women in the project.

Roma women are participating in debates and reflections in which education is becoming the central issue as they know it will allow them to improve their current situation. More than ever Roma women are stating the need of education as a priority since it is the main requisite that the information society demands. Starting from this thought many associations and Roma social movements were created. These were created to promote the encouragement of boys and girls to stay in school. Other associations took the initiative to provide labour education for the labour inclusion of Roma women. In this case, the centres of adult education are the educational spaces where Roma women are turning to obtain official accreditation improving their knowledge in connection with their experiences.

One of the characteristics of the Roma women associations is the intergenerational relationships. This is an important aspect since the actions and decisions taken by the associations have a global approach, in which all women are represented. The evidence collected from the analysis of the practices of Roma women associations is the overall statement that education is the best tool that can help the community to overcome social exclusion. Therefore, it is important for the centres for adult education and other educational institutions to work on promoting educational programmes with positive results and creating solutions for Roma women. Similarly the participants of the project stated the need to develop a common line of work and connections between the primary and secondary schools with centres for adult education to achieve a continuation in the educational paths of children, youth and Roma women.

The basic common elements in all the Roma women associations are solidarity and egalitarian dialogue. The aim that the community can live in better conditions is endorsing their actions to be closer to the families and Roma women. The experiences of the Roma women associations are stating the need to create channels of connection with the administration and other Roma associations. These organisations are declaring as a result of networking

and collaborative work to have higher access to common projects that bring together efforts to promote a better life for Roma families. Another highlight that Roma women associations are demonstrating is to work for a social involvement without losing their identity. For example as a Roma women said (Elboj, 2004):

“We, Roma women are changing, the world is changing and we want to change with the world. And we want to work and to have our independence. This is very important, without forgetting that we are Roma and taking into account our traditions.”

The active participation of Roma women in spaces such as the labour market, education and associations demonstrates their tenacity and dedication facilitating new horizons. This process in addition promotes the overcoming of prejudices and racist generalisations regarding their culture.

In conclusion the contributions from and for the Roma women associations for the improvement of the situation of Roma women in the public sphere describe among others education of quality for a better labour incorporation, creating social networks, supporting egalitarian dialogue and solidarity as a key element for transformation and giving especial importance to education and lifelong learning within the social movements.

Experience of the Drom Kotar Mestipen Gatherings

The Drom Kotar Mestipen is a Roma association of women, a non-profit organisation created in 1999 by Romani and non Romani women with different characteristics (age, academic level, job, etc.) with the aim of fighting for a common objective which is the promotion of Romani women and her people without refusing their identity. In this sense, the members of this organisation want to overcome the triple exclusion that Romani women suffer, that is for being women, for being Roma and because most of them have low academic educational levels. Therefore this association strongly believes in education as the way to overcome the inequalities they suffer.

In 2002 the Drom Kotar Mestipen association started to organise gatherings of Romani women mainly to create a space for dialogue where Romani women are the main character and among all the participants discuss and find solutions for school failure and absenteeism. The gatherings take place in a school in neighbourhoods with a high rate of Roma population. These gatherings have different objectives, since each gathering has a particular educational theme as a topic, besides the main aim to find solutions to school failure and absenteeism from the voices of the participants, the participants have a section of the gathering with experiences in which Romani girls and women who are students present their experiences which will become positive references for other participants of the gathering. These gatherings promote the creation of specific spaces of exchange and support in which girls, youth and adult Roma women debate and create knowledge on the most important issues of education to overcome absenteeism and school failure. Furthermore,

they are also promoting Romani access to higher education and publicising role models of reference in order to eradicate absenteeism, enhance achievement motivation, and develop new academic expectations. As one Roma women said (Valls, 2003):

“Twenty years ago there were no Roma going to school, and now all Roma children or almost all, they are in school. Maybe in ten years many will attend high school. Then, this gap that exists today... do you think it would become smaller with time? Yes, but it is also important that reference models are being created (...) that there will be more job positions with Roma people (...) I mean, that there would be Romani soccer coaches, doctors, etc... but there should also be some of these people working close to the neighbourhoods where Roma people live.”

The gatherings of Romani women facilitate the network between women of different neighbourhoods and of different ages. These gatherings facilitate the creation of positive role models and help to promote academic high expectations. Through the gathering all the participants get involved in the reflection and debates over the importance of education to overcome social exclusion situations. For that reason the participants discussed the causes of absenteeism and early school failure of girls and young Roma women, giving especial emphasis to primary and secondary schools. All the participants look for alternatives and proposals of action to overcome this situation and they also thought about paths to achieve higher goals, making that Roma girls and women achieve the aims that they dream to achieve.

As an example, in one of the recent gatherings of Roma women the participants exchanged experiences and reflection on the current educational model and the model of education that Roma women would like to have in order to achieve academic success at the same time that would promote positive Roma role models. In this gathering it was also stated the need for a greater relationship between the Roma culture and the schools and how this relationship should be. The Drom Kotar Mestipen association, by means of these gatherings for the discussion of education plans to achieve social inclusion and overcome the negative stereotypes that Roma people suffer.

Conclusion

It has been stated by the reviewed research projects and the educational experiences presented in this paper that Roma women value education both for themselves and for their children. Educational centres should by means of further educational actions take into account the education of Roma women to promote their labour market integration and their social inclusion. It is by means of spaces of dialogue such as the Roma women associations and the Roma women gatherings promoted by the association Drom Kotar Mestipen as presented in this paper that encourage many women to transform their dreams and thoughts into actions for change by reconnecting with the school for adults in their neighbourhood, or registering for a labour insertion course. Not only young women dream of a better future for them but also their mothers and grandmothers seize the opportunities of today's information society and dream for example on creating an association or taking up driving lessons.

The educational and scientific importance of such studies and experiences consists in the contributions made for the breaking-off of the widely spread stereotypes against the Romani women in Spain. Romani women are changing their family's lives and society in general by struggling for their access to the labour market and breaking the stereotypes imposed on them. The existence of stereotypes and prejudices towards the Roma community affect their rights to access to a quality education, and therefore shapes their future labour opportunities.

The research projects here presented and the educational experiences add to shatter this kind of arguments from a scientific research perspective. Furthermore, the social impact achieved with the results of these projects contribute to the transformation of those exclusion situations and has a say in the fight against the discrimination that suffer all Roma people and especially in this case women.

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23. MUSEUMS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING? THE TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF ADULT IMMIGRANTS LEARNING ENGLISH IN MUSEUMS IN SCOTLAND

Sherice Clarke

Introduction

This paper reports on doctoral research that explores the use of museums for adult ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) in the City of Edinburgh Council Museums and Galleries. In the UK over the last decade, there has been a considerable push from the museum sector to establish approaches that might make museums, their collections and educational provision more inclusive and accessible to wider audiences. These initiatives are often born out of policy promoting inclusion and social cohesion (e.g. Scottish Office 1999, Council of Europe 2001) and connected to the implications that immigration has on adult education provision (see, for example, Scottish Executive 2007).

In the UK context, ESOL in museums is increasingly situated within policy promoting social inclusion. With an increasing recognition of what has been referred to as the museum's 'social role' in relation to communities, the social inclusion agenda of the museum sector has sought to identify and eliminate those barriers that have traditionally excluded under-represented groups from engaging with their resources (Newman & McLean, 2004: 171-173). The approach adopted by many museums to tackle social exclusion has been one that emphasises increased access for individuals, thus eliminating financial, physical, attitudinal, cultural and linguistic barriers that might have previously hindered their involvement (Dodd & Sandell 2001).

While *ESOL in museums* is commonly at the crux of a museum's inclusion strategy, there has not yet been significant empirical research that has explored adult learners' experiences or that has investigated the benefits in relation to language learning within these informal, yet quite specific, learning environments. This paper will present preliminary findings from a small-scale qualitative study that seeks to address the aforementioned research imperatives. It will argue for the necessity of "holistic" approaches to adult ESOL provision, that is: provision that addresses the needs and wants of learners from diverse cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds; provision that is informed by a comprehensive conceptualisation of second language acquisition that accounts for social factors such as learners' identities, and their impact on learning and acquisition; and finally provision that goes beyond simply the instrumental in nature.

This paper will begin by outlining the conceptual framework for the study, the research methodology, and then discuss key findings emerging from the data.

Social dimensions of adult language learning

The field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has been historically dominated by cognitive models of language and language learning, which some have argued, have not accounted for social and contextual factors that might play a significant role in the process of language learning (Firth and Wagner 1997). A growing body of research is looking towards social explanations for language learning to understand differences that set learners apart from one another. A growing branch of that research is exploring the role that identity has on learning an additional language (Block 2007a, 2007b, Norton 2000).

Research into identity and language learning has challenged the assumption that learning language through immersion in a majority language context is a direct route to fluency in that language (Norton 2000, Block 2007a). Instead, debate on language learning and identity has suggested that the process could be far more complex than this. Norton's life history research of adult migrants in Canada suggests that identity is a site of struggle and negotiation for language learners as they seek access to or gain membership to a 'community of practice' (Norton 2000). Drawing on the Bourdieuan concept of language and symbolic power, she argues that social and historically constructed relationships between learners and the target language can affect learners' 'investment' in their learning (Norton 2000). Norton argues that learners' social identity can be shaped by their social interaction, and points to the significance of the presence (or absence) of the 'right to speak', that is, being given the social space in which to be heard (Norton Peirce, 1995, 18). Norton's work has explored learners' positionality, that is, their identity in relation to the target language community. She argues for a re-evaluation of the concept of motivation, such as one that considers how learners' subject position influence their investment in the target language and therefore their acquisition of that language (Norton, 2000, Norton Peirce, 1995).

Situating this study contextually within social inclusion policy and the educational provision that has stemmed from it, this study uses identity and language learning as a conceptual framework within which to understand the target group's experience.

Methodology

Empirical investigation of adult ESOL in museums was conducted in a 3-phase study carried out between December 2007 and September 2008. The first phase helped to map substantive issues with respect to adult ESOL learners in Edinburgh. The second phase trialled the use of museums for adult ESOL instruction and the third phase sought to understand participants' experiences of adult ESOL in museums in depth.

The study was based in Edinburgh, Scotland, which has recently experienced rather rapid demographic changes in light of EU enlargement and with labour migration encouraged by the Scottish Government (Scottish Executive 2001, 2006, Sriskandarajah 2004), as well as having been impacted on by changes in the UK's asylum dispersal policy that has settled asylum seekers in Scotland's cities since 2000 (Institute of Public Policy Research, 2005). These

changes have contributed to emerging new communities in Edinburgh, a term which I will use to refer to economic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers inclusively. Emerging new communities have had implications for Edinburgh's adult education provision as well as social cohesion (Scottish Executive 2007). Programmes like ESOL in museums attempt to address these new needs.

This study was conducted with the participation of the City of Edinburgh Council Museums and Galleries service, whose main remit it is to collect, preserve and provide educational resources about the culture, history, people and art of Edinburgh. For the first phase of the study, two community-based ESOL classes that provide part-time ESOL for members of the new and settled immigrant communities in Edinburgh were observed and 10 adult learners from these classes participated in two separate focus groups. Focus group participants represented the range of diversity present in community-based ESOL in Edinburgh e.g. settled immigrants, asylum seekers and economic migrants; Kurdish, Polish, Algerian, Pakistani, Ukrainian, Chinese, Japanese and Indian. The focus groups explored the participants' experiences in Edinburgh to date, in particular, their experiences engaging with the target language community and their perceived learning needs, which had been shaped largely in part by their engagement with the local community. Thematic analysis of observations and focus group discussions highlighted salient aspects of participants' experiences and aspirations.

The primary aims of the second phase of the study were to consider how museums and their collections could be utilised for adult ESOL and how this type of provision might be made relevant to adult ESOL learners. The first phase, supported by a review of literature in the fields of adult education, informal learning and museum learning and education, adult ESOL and second language acquisition, facilitated an understanding of the learners and learning in museums so as to develop the framework for ESOL in museums that was implemented during this phase.

One of the driving forces of this research, which simultaneously serves as a rationale for working within an action research paradigm, was the need to research 'with' rather than 'on' participants (Heron and Reason, 2001). That is, this research argues that enquiry into ESOL in museums necessitates the perspectives and insights, hence participation, of adult ESOL learners. Six adult ESOL learners from diverse backgrounds who had recently immigrated to Edinburgh participated in five ESOL sessions in five museums in Edinburgh. These sessions trialled and evaluated approaches to teaching English through the use of the museum collections. Participants were engaged as co-researchers in the process and critical evaluative discussions were held at the end of each session to examine their experiences and perspectives. Each session revolved through the action research cycle of reflection and action (Heron and Reason, 2001), so that subsequent iterations were both informed and increasingly clarified. In addition, pre- and post interviews were conducted with each participant to explore their biographies, reflections and evaluations of ESOL in museums with hindsight.

The third phase of the study aimed to explore adult ESOL in museums in depth. It built upon that which was learnt in the first and second phases to implement a three-month long ESOL in museums course with a cohort of 14

adult ESOL learners in Edinburgh. An ESOL teacher and a learning assistant from the local community facilitated the sessions, with the researcher's role for this phase as participant observer. Prior to implementation of this phase, the course was developed, materials prepared and the teacher and learning assistant were briefed on implementation. The principles of the course design were to develop an ESOL course that

- Gives voice to the learners and builds on their current linguistic knowledge.
- Uses museums and their collections as a stimulus to language work.
- Promotes oral/aural fluency development by generating authentic gaps of communication which encourage learners to converse.
- Makes museums and their collections accessible to new communities in Scotland.
- Is relevant to the needs and interests of the learners.
- Incorporates learners' experiential knowledge and meets learners at their level.
- Creates a positive classroom environment and therefore encourages risk-taking.
- Explores identities and culture.
- Places pair/group work as central to the classroom organisation to encourage conversation amongst peers.

Grounding the research in sociocultural theory of learning, the sessions were audio and video recorded to enable conversation analysis of learners' talk in pairs and groups as one approach to understanding ESOL in museums. Time series interviews were conducted to map the learners' experiences, tease out critical incidents for in-depth understandings and participative analysis and to consider changes in the learners over time. In the following section, I will discuss some of the preliminary findings from the study.

Preliminary Findings

The third phase of the study has generated two rich sources of data that help to give insight into ESOL and museums. The interviews provide accounts of participants' lived experiences in Scotland, journeys as learners and 'users' of the target language and learning in museums. Inductive analysis is being conducted to illuminate themes within and across cases. The observations have generated rich accounts of learning in museums through talk-in-action, using objects as a stimulus for language work. Conversation analysis is being conducted to gain insight into learning through talk within these informal and specific learning contexts. In this section, I will highlight some themes emerging from the data, then consider some of the possibilities and opportunities for adult ESOL in museums.

Reconceptualising self as 'able'

L1's Vignette: L1 had immigrated to Scotland from Poland 3 years ago seeking a life change. She had owned her own business for several decades, however the economic climate in Poland was such that her business went under. She felt finding a new job was challenging because age (50s) was a barrier to employment in Poland. Recently divorced and an empty nester made the prospect of immigrating to Scotland seem like an exciting new adventure to her. She migrated with great hope and excitement.

L1 had been from the generation of Poles that learned Russian, German and French as foreign languages in school and described herself as having had no exposure to English prior to her arrival in Scotland. She refers to herself as a *disabled* user of English. She spent her first months gaining mastery over ‘survival’ English through self-study to enable her to get a job. After some time she found full-time work in a factory and part-time work cleaning at a take-away restaurant. Her work at the factory has provided few opportunities to speak, and fewer opportunities to speak English given that many of her co-workers are from Lithuania or Poland, therefore Russian or Polish serves as their lingua franca. At the take-away restaurant, her employer suggested that she not interact with the customers because of her English. With a full-time and part-time job she has had very little time for learning or leisure in Scotland. However, it is important for her to continue learning English so that she might have ‘contact’ with people in Scotland as she plans to stay in Scotland for the rest of her life. Speaking English is a great source of fear for her and she feels that people judge her when she speaks, and this perceived judgment makes her ‘go inside’. She has relied on friends who are more fluent in English to assist her with daily tasks such as communicating with the bank.

L1’s case encapsulates one aspect of adult language learners’ identity struggle that was apparent in several cases in this study: the movement from able (that is, perception of what one could express or accomplish in one’s mother tongue) to a sense of being disabled through migration (perception of self as being less able to express or accomplish in the target language as compared to one’s mother tongue). However, as Norton suggests, identities are not static, but instead multiple, negotiated and shaped (2000). Observations and in-depth interviews highlighted that learners were actively regaining a sense of being ‘able’ in the target language (that is, negotiating the difference between able/disabled).

Shifting attitudes from disenchantment to engagement

L2’s vignette: **L2** migrated from Poland with his partner 2 years ago, interested in exploring the new opportunities that Scotland offered. In Poland he was a travelling salesman for a large community. Communication, he suggests, is his forte. One of his motivations for moving to Scotland was his desire to learn English. He, like **L1**, did not speak English upon arrival in Edinburgh. His first few months were a source of great frustration for him as he was not able to interact with the local community as he would have liked and make basic requests, such as asking for directions. He has a bachelor’s degree from a university in Poland but felt his qualifications were not transferable to the Scottish context because not having full fluency in English meant that he was deskilled and could not pursue sales positions in Edinburgh. He drifted between unskilled labour jobs in Edinburgh that did not require the use of the English. He worked reluctantly as a labourer in a slaughterhouse and as a cargo handler.

His engagement with members of the local community was limited to the few interactions he had on his jobs. **L2** felt his colleagues categorised him as an uneducated migrant labourer. Very much to his dismay, he felt his

colleagues used a Scottish dialect when they wanted to exclude him or his Polish colleagues from their conversations and standard English when they needed to convey some instruction. His concern for speaking grammatically correct and concern about the potential difficulty people might have understanding him were a source of anxiety, which sometimes made him afraid to speak. He expressed negative attitudes towards Polish migrants in Edinburgh and preferred not to associate with this migrant community.

In **L2's** case, he was disenchanted with the Polish migrant community in Edinburgh, who he perceived as having contributed to the way the target language community engaged with him. He was skeptical about adult ESOL courses because he felt he could not improve his English through communicating with adult ESOL learners.

However, observations and time-series interviews highlighted shifting attitudes in cases like **L2**. Negative attitudes seemed to have given way to more moderate ones. What was most significant in these cases was a shift in the participants' willingness to engage with others, which may help to explain the journeys these learners took. After having finished the ESOL in museums course, participants joined other community-based ESOL classes. These were participants that had not previously joined ESOL courses in Edinburgh because of their negative perception of courses and the learners that joined them. Becoming members of a 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991), in this case adult ESOL in museums, engaging with concepts of culture and identity through the medium of English seemed to help shift these learners' attitudes about the target language, target language context and language education.

A social space for talking about "things that interest me"

The realities of migration, can bring with it issues of isolation, difficulties entering the job market, new challenges communicating and unsettling experiences of identity negotiation that individuals face when settling into new and unfamiliar settings, such as that described above. These factors can contribute to individuals feeling socially excluded from the mainstream community (Hodge et al, 2004). Some studies of adult ESOL have found that it is challenging to keep these worlds outside the classroom context (Hodge 2007, Baynham 2006). Following Cooke and Roberts, I would argue that perhaps we should be opening up spaces for talk in which learners can *learn through talk* (2007, 8).

What follows is an excerpt from a discussion that developed in a session's visit to the People's Story Museum. The People's Story is an oral history museum, its collection is based on oral reminiscences of local Edinburgh residents. One of the participants opened a discussion of a diorama in the museum's collection that displays a homeless man that once lived on Edinburgh's streets. The discussion begins with participants recalling and describing the display and what they understood from the diorama and wall text, the discussion then quickly progresses to a discussion of cross-cultural comparisons of homelessness.

L4: yeah. It's because the homeless here are different. I don't know in European no, but I mean America in South America it's different. Because the homeless here (++) this people may be with mental problems, depressive, yeah?

L2: because the people can work=

L4: //but//

L2: //they can rent//

L4: =the people can't go go works

L2: //yeah//

L4: it's because the people don't want. They don't want to go to job, the people is depressive, the people feel alone, yeah? Because you can speak with the people sit down in the road with the (+ +) with the (+ +) the blanket. but it's not a crazy

T2: //uh huh//

L4: it's not (+ +) it's not the ((inaudible)) people. In our countries the homeless (+ +) is people that the people haven't ANY opportunities in the life (+) (4) It's different=

T1: =so in (+ +) uh, before the do the (+ +) in the streets of Edinburgh you see you quite often see homeless people begging cause I've=

T2: (((inaudible/excited)))//

L4: (((inaudible/excited)))//

L4: =because the people to eat something with. The people is not aggressive. The people study, go to the Council, go to any program go to lunch or breakfast and the people say ok I want to job maybe 2 hours early people help (+ +) and the people (+ +) that people, I I I comparison, has

L2: //so that people are lazy?//

L4: =has the opportunity to go to school because they speaking was in school but the people are more depressive and more ((inaudible)) anything else but no no when you compare it to our countries and homes this is because a people born (+ +) very very poor (+ +) very bad place (+ +) ANY opportunities (+ +) any (+ +) and they haven't options.

T2: no choice.

L4: no choice.

T1: //is it **the same in your countries?**// ((referring to the other participants))

L2: the same in your country? ((referring to the other participants))

All: ((laugh))

L2: yeah we've got homeless because eh (+ +) we earn (+ +) we earn not enough. Someone work eh (+ +) they get for example 200 per month (+ +) pound per month. It's uh little, minimum. So if someone works still and got flat everything will be ok but if someone eh lost his job and family can't help him, he may be stay homeless. But there are all types of family helps, you know wife helps husband, husband helps wife, grandmothers helps her children –

L7: = but **not government**

L2: **not government** ((chuckles))

L7: **not government=**

L1: = but here ((inaudible)) government help the people=

T1: = ((inaudible)) agencies

L3: = homeless people in my country but not the choice because this the example of

L4: //corruption in our country//

L3: =war. Yes.

L4: CORRUPTION.

L3: Yes. IN MY COUNTRY IS AN EXAMPLE OF WAR.

T2: yes.

L3: Yes so many peoples they don't have homes they don't get good opportunities for education and eat as well (+ +) uhm but it's not their choice same like here cause if you want to do something you can do anything. You can find more opportunities, so if you don't think this is your choice and this is your freedom then this is your fault. But in my country the people (+ +) ((inaudible)) because it is the center of war and (+ +) but never mind ((chuckles)) yeah so we don't have more opportunities to do something. But when, just people in the town, ok, but in ((inaudible referring to a region)) area and south Sudan

This is but one instance of the participants' critical engagement with museum collections. The participants (L) actively participate in 'authentic' conversation. Authentic here is to be contrasted with form-focused tasks that aim to get learners to reproduce specific grammatical forms, in which 'turns' in talk are often assigned and an authentic communicative gap is frequently absent. These are common features of speaking instruction in ESOL. Here, as the excerpt illustrates, the participants actively engage in authentic open discussion attending to and responding to co-participants' meanings, where the teacher (T1) and learning assistant (T2) serve as a language resource that they draw on when needed.

Discussion

There are several implications of the emergent findings presented here that might provide possibilities and opportunities for future implementation of ESOL in museums with adult learners. I will discuss them in turn.

The excerpt above shows adult learners participating in a discussion about a topic that emerged from their visit to a museum. What appears evident is that the text is quite dense lexically. In addition, it is also noteworthy that communication between participants is successful, that is, utterances are understood and attended to. Learners arguably convey quite complex ideas in a language they are learning and one that they perceive themselves as being 'disabled' in. Baynham et al's (2007) discourse analysis classroom talk highlighted that when learners were given opportunities to 'speak from within',

that is, about their lives and experiences outside the classroom context “they [had] to assemble whatever resources they have to convey intent and are pushed to extend their communicative ability in ways beyond the requirements of the more tightly controlled and less personally engaging elements of the lesson” (Baynham et al 2007, 58). SLA research suggests that these are the very conditions in which further learning and acquisition of a language can occur (Cooke and Roberts, 2007, 2). Arguably this might also provide a space within which learners can negotiate their identities as ‘users’ in the target language.

Allowing for opportunities for ‘pushed output’ can not only extend learners’ linguistically, but also give voice to their emotions, perceptions and experiences. While this might not be the remit of formal learning contexts, this can be one of the opportunities that museums as language learning contexts can afford. Using the collections as a catalyst for language work seemed to have provided scope for learners like **L1** to express their thoughts and opinions in relation to the museum collections. The approach taken for the sessions was one that views museum learning as an active and interactive process rather than passive transmission of facts from curator to learner (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994). The course design enabled learners to construct meaning from museum collections through their respective personal, social and political meanings. While adult ESOL research suggests that the personal, social and political are increasingly difficult to distance from the classroom context when teaching adult immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers whose lives might be fraught with challenges, there seems to be limited scope within adult ESOL curricula, syllabi and materials within which adult learners can explore these perspectives (Hodge et al, 2004; Baynham, 2006; Baynham et al, 2007: 24).

Museums signify places of leisure and enjoyment, ESOL in museums moves language learning to a real-world context in which the participants were able to do real-world things, such as expressing thoughts and opinions. What has emerged from data across cases was the significance of the museum context as providing a social space for learners to express their identities and meanings, one that allows them to talk about ‘things that interest [them]’. For some, this was particularly relevant as they had limited engagement with the language(s) in their daily lives and ESOL in museums enabled them to engage in complex ideas, express their opinions and share their culture. For **L1** in particular, ESOL in museums provided her with her first opportunity for this type of engagement with people in English. This seemed to have a great impact on her both as a learner and ‘user’ of English, which starkly contrasted her experiences of social exclusion in her daily life. By the course’s end, **L1** started participating as a ‘user’ of English outside class, speaking for the first time to the amazement of her friends and colleagues. **L1** started to negotiate her perceived gap from a ‘disabled’ speaker of English to able. For others this experience was significant as it starkly contrasted the type of interaction/engagement that typified their encounters with members of the local community in Edinburgh, which were primarily transactional in nature.

Adult ESOL curricula focuses on the acquisition of discrete skills, grammar and lexis, with an emphasis on utility. While by no means will I make a case against the acquisition of these important language skills, I would instead like to

make a call for “holistic” adult ESOL provision that seeks to address a broader range of skills to help enable learners as ‘users’ of English.

The first and second phase of the study highlighted the need for more opportunities for communication in adult ESOL. The first phase’s focus group discussions expressed dissatisfaction with adult ESOL provision because it focused on skills that they felt were less essential for their daily lives such as reading and writing. Again, I do not wish to make a case here for the cessation of reading and writing instruction in adult ESOL, but instead would like to highlight learners’ desires to communicate, that is, that they aspire to have access to and gain membership to this community of practice (English language speakers in Scotland). This is one of the primary reasons why the ESOL in museums course developed for this study focused on developing communication skills in English and I would argue that this is one of the opportunities practitioners might consider for exploiting museums for adult ESOL.

Conclusion

All learners, especially adult learners bring with them a vast resource of prior knowledge to new learning experiences. These resources were of great service in learning encounters in museums, largely fueling participants’ engagement with the language and culture. Learners’ personal, historical and political meanings mediated their learning through museum objects, and learners drew on these meanings as ways to connect to the museums and their collections. Centering ESOL in museums round adult ESOL learners and their meanings helped participants to mobilise their linguistic knowledge into fluent discourse and make language work relevant to their lives, experiences and personal meanings. Preliminary findings from this study suggest that this type of provision can fulfill basic yet significant roles in adult learners’ language development: promoting confidence and encouraging risk-taking, providing a social space through which identities can be expressed and explored through the medium of English, enabling learners to engage with the language and culture in real-world contexts to achieve real-world communication, and finally to help them gain membership to a community of practice.

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24. CHALLENGING NOTIONS OF IDENTITY IN THE LEARNING JOURNEY

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Introduction

Racialised and minority populations in Canada are politicised by personally challenging experiences linked to their learning and on the basis of their racial, cultural, and ethnic identity. These experiences ultimately influence educational processes for adult learners. Aboriginal peoples have particularly been affected by colonisation and the residential school¹ experience in a present day context. Issues of racial and cultural identity both inform and influence adult learners who come from racially diverse groups. For many racial groups, choices about learning, career, and employment are highly influenced by family and educational history. Issues of empowerment and control often affect personal choices and the opportunities for identity formation. Identity may also be constructed through hegemonic discourses. These factors may contribute to a fracturing of personal development and the expectations of the self. Furthermore, these challenges are often manifested in classroom interactions, institutional practices, and the broader learning journey.

Identity is shaped by how people are recognised and represented, as well as through individual personal and social relations. Identity raises questions about the ontology of the self, the process of becoming, and the dialectical nature of relationships. Identity as a construct is difficult and surfaces the precarious relationship between belonging and essentialising. Identity may also challenge assimilationist notions of 'fitting in' within an educational institution.

Racialised groups are often subject to reductionist public, institutional discourses and stereotypes (Henry & Tator, 2002; Jiwani, 2006). Hall (1992) talks about identity as not being fixed or centred and refers to the acknowledgment of history, language, and culture that produces a contextual background to ethnicity, subjectivity and identity. While hooks (1990) argues for complexity of identity and radical subjectivity, queer and gender theory also challenges notions of fixed identity (Butler, 1999). These discourses are exemplified in the lives of adult learners.

This paper describes the experiences of Aboriginal adult learners in two different university contexts in Canada. Drawing from a larger study of three universities, interviews were conducted across Canada. Through narrative interviews with students, the paper examines the stories, motives, and challenges of adult learners.

¹ During the mid 1850s to 1960s in Canada, Aboriginal children were taken from their homes to attend residential schools run by the church. This was a practice of assimilation. Children were not allowed to speak their native language, or practice any of their cultural customs.

Identity as a construction

Numerous authors explore racial identity through the context of culture, history, and participation in community. Racial identity formation is therefore constructed as a social, historical, and political project. Li (2007) examines identity through the discourses of cultural development and within the tensions of citizenship participation in Canada. Li uses examples of how cultural and racial identity are constructed through community, media, and arts (i.e. visual images). Li's work refers to Asian authors who write about their art, poetry, and culture. These venues gave Asian voices a place where they could be identified, recognised, and heard. The connection between history and community is underscored.

Kelly (1998) studied the identity of 'Black' students in a Canadian high school context. The narratives in her work explore the personal and racialised stories of students and give an explanation of how these individuals have indeed constructed themselves as Black in a learning environment. Khayatt (1994) and Tyagi (1996) articulate the ways in which they are constructed because they are women, immigrants, having brown skin, and working in the academy. Khayatt has a sense of what her identity is and is *not*, even while identities may be imposed on her. Khayatt is not seen as a Canadian because her primary identity is that of an immigrant, even though she has education and some of the vestiges of class status.

Similarly, there is a contestation surrounding national identity in the context of the First Peoples or Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal identities are complex and are framed with the contexts of cultural imperialism and the resistance to being defined by dominant discourses. As the researcher, I am aware that even the act of writing about Aboriginal identities may be considered a form of colonialism. Arnott (1994) asserts her identity as a having a mixed ancestry (Native/ Aboriginal and European), while being raised within a white working class community. Arnott's writing is part of her "claiming" her self definition. Her struggle and identity as a person of mixed ancestry can be troubling in terms of belonging, but also in terms of the politics of recognition (Taylor,1994).

Identity may be defined as "involving the ongoing development of internal conceptions of oneself based on establishing links between oneself and others" (Pullin & Stark, 1999, p. 1). It can therefore be argued that individuals develop a sense of racial identity and this identity influences their every day life and reality. Thus, identity is constructed through a number of forces, including social and personal forces in the post-secondary, adult learning environment. Identity is an issue for people constructed through difference or "otherness", as well as for those in power, and those who construct the "otherness".

Canadian context

Canada identifies itself as a multicultural nation and as a nation of immigrants. Within this identity, there exists a politicisation of racial and minority populations (Bannerji, 1997). Bannerji articulates the contradictions that exist with regard to nation state formation and the citizenship of individuals who are not normative in race, religion or ethnicity. These questions remain unanswered within educational and learning contexts.

A profound influence on the education of Aboriginal peoples is the Indian Act (1876), which was a policy of assimilation in Canada. The Act still exists, and has had long term effects, which include a climate of colonisation and the aftermath of the residential school experience. Historically, Aboriginal peoples were viewed as “uncivilised” and residential schools were established for the purposes of “civilising” children by removing them from their families and their culture (Institute of Indigenous Government, 1996). Further, the Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) has articulated the problems of recruiting and retaining Aboriginal students in higher education, as well as systemic racism, and health, social, and educational issues facing Aboriginal peoples today.

Methodology

The research was conceptualised as a qualitative, exploratory design, using interviews and narratives. The main research objective was to explore the experiences of individuals in relation to the subject of social justice (i.e., notions of fairness, equity, human rights, access, race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and class). This research took place within the university system. Some of these interviews began a focus on race or ethnicity, while others focused specifically on gender or human rights issues. The openness of the interview process allowed participants to think broadly about social justice –and how this subject was connected to their own experiences. Race became more prominent through the exploration of individual diversity for a number of participants, and directed their focus on social justice within a racial and ethnic context.

Three universities were visited and narrative interviews were conducted with faculty, administrators, and students. Fourteen student interviews were conducted; some students had dual roles as teaching assistants or student advisors. The interview was a space where individuals could make sense of the intersection of individual experiences and institutional life. Participants in the research had been working and/or attending the university for a period of five years, and had a distinct sense of what it meant to “be” within the institution. In a reflective process, participants and researchers could make a connection between the personal and the social experiences of their lives (Evans, 1993).

Ethical considerations

The research conducted was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University of the Fraser Valley, as well as the universities visited. An important issue was the way in which the interviews and narratives would take place, considering anonymity and confidentiality, and how the interview content would be used. These issues were discussed with the ethics boards as well as the participants who were interviewed. The interviews had the potential to give participants voice within the research process. At the same time, research has the potential to reproduce colonizing discourses of the “other”. This issue was kept in mind while discussing participation in the research and the “uses” of the interview content.

As a researcher, there is an engagement in an interactive, reflexive process of discussion with the participants and their experiences (van Manen, 1997).

Feminists (Acker, Barry & Esseveld, 1996; Griffiths, 1998) argue that women and other peoples who have been marginalised may benefit from a range of collaborative and empowering research methods because the methods themselves are a way of challenging the dominant politics of knowledge. Both these possibilities were present in the work done in the interviews. My location as a woman researcher (primarily feminist), coming from Chinese Canadian perspectives made me more aware and sensitive to the tensions involved in engaging in research that worked with ideas of racial identity.

Preliminary findings

The findings focus on two Aboriginal people who participated in the research. The interviews provided insight into the motivation and challenges of adult learners, and policy and practices within the universities. Acts of agency, changing systems, and the politicisation of learners who work in the university environment were thematic to the narratives. The stories provide examples, challenges, and the uses of “resistance” for advocacy.

Jim’s story and the Jay Treaty²

Jim is an Aboriginal student, who also works at the university. He is an educational counsellor and advocate for other Aboriginal students, as well as being enrolled in a degree programme. His experiences with the university have left him frustrated and often advocating for himself, with a sense of being on his own. At the same time, Jim shows a strong sense of resilience and sense of commitment to his principles and goals.

The university where Jim attends and works, offers a three year combined interdisciplinary degree between Indigenous Studies and one other discipline. However the degree has not showed any significant growth, and “can’t sell the programme to the community with a three year degree. You need an honours degree. Otherwise it’s a dead end”.

The three year degree became a type of consolation degree because it did not have the status or the acknowledgment that other four year, honours degrees would have. This was a troubling way to recruit Aboriginal students to the university, and posed questions, challenges, and lack of funding. The degree should have wide appeal, especially because of the location of the university, and yet the degree raised questions about marginality of Aboriginal peoples. Jim talked about the geographic proximity of the university to the Aboriginal (First Nations) Reserve, and lack of Aboriginal students enrolled:

“We have arguably the largest Aboriginal reserve on our doorstep. The Aboriginal enrollment (here) is really low. ... maybe 200 to 250 [Aboriginal] students on campus, and there are something like 23,000 students on campus...”

² All names are pseudonyms.

“We are very tied to the community. I go out and recruit in the community. It was some people from the community who were influential in starting this [program].”

The enrollment within the university for Aboriginal students is low –less than 01 %. This calls into question the perceptions of a university that is inclusive and accessible.

Jim said that the university is viewed as an “*Aboriginal friendly campus*”. At the same time, there are no obvious images of “friendliness”. For example, Jim remarked on the absence of a longhouse³ or visible signs that acknowledge the Aboriginal peoples, and the land on which the university is placed.

“We are the first Indigenous Studies programme.... Why is there no Indigenous building or gateway? Something that demonstrates a commitment to Indigenous culture?”

Jim’s own learning has been challenged because he is frequently regarded as the spokesperson for Aboriginal peoples. He is on many committees, which often motivated by an attempt by the university of representation and inclusiveness on committees. At the same time, he resists being “called on” in classroom and other settings to speak solely as an Aboriginal person. His identity is much more complex than being Aboriginal, being an employee, being a student.

“Because I’m a ___ [discipline] student. ... This campus really feels like ___ it’s very discipline specific. Over there is medical, and then there is this side: arts and social science. I don’t really feel like a ___[university] employee or a ___ [university] student. I feel like an Indigenous Studies employee and a ___ [discipline] student.”

As an employee and as a student/ learner, Jim acknowledges the complexity of his identity and the roles that he undertakes. He does not actually take on an identity that has to do with the university – it is about his work in Indigenous Studies, the discipline where he is a student, and being an Aboriginal person.

One of Jim’s accounts is the sobering narrative of the Jay Treaty. The Jay Treaty is a treaty between the United States and Canada passed in 1794. The treaty created a stipulation that is intended to allow Aboriginal peoples to cross the Canada US border freely without any impediments placed upon them. Many Aboriginal peoples have Nations land that crosses the Canada US border. Thus, peoples of these Nations are within their land/territory, whether they are in Canada or the US. This poses problems to individuals who cross the border regularly –in an environment of heightened security where the border crossings are rigidly enforced and scrutinised.

At one point, Jim’s Aboriginal identity placed him in the position of being viewed as an American, whereby the university was asking him to pay international fees –even though he is not an American within the determination of the Jay Treaty.

“We have the right to live and work on both sides of the border. ...This is our traditional territory. I’m considered a landed immigrant here,

³ A longhouse is a “home away from home” for Aboriginal peoples. It is a place for cultural events, study and reflects the culture of Aboriginal peoples.

and I pay international fees. .. I'm characterised as a foreign student and I had to leave the country and immigrate back in. So to keep my job I had to be a full time student. This is my territory! I had to get a work permit."

"With the help of ____, there has been a review of the policy so First Nations students from the states would be honoured by the Jay Treaty. That we will be honoured, even if the government doesn't.... so they would only charge residence fees not international fees. Something like that would mean a lot to Native people. So even if I still need a work permit at least I'm not paying \$10,000 as an international student."

This policy story is one of challenge and advocacy. This is a space in which Jim advocates for himself and for other students that might be facing the same barriers to accessing education. The story is also about borders and margins –which are often transitional and challenging spaces.

With the support of a colleague, a department head, Jim was able to uphold his challenge to the university. Jim's narrative is about the historical, political context and the impact on him as an Aboriginal student in a university near the border. He feels strongly that he must act, and that there is an important reason for acting –to ensure access to learning. He refuses to be defined by the university as someone who is "foreign", even though others may "mark" him as such. Jim's story evokes ideals regarding challenging borders, policies, and the institution.

Shawna: Working with Connections

Shawna is a recent alumna in her university, an Aboriginal woman, and she works with Aboriginal students. Her role is to provide support to Aboriginal learners both socially and academically. Transitions for Aboriginal students from a school environment into an adult learning (university) environment involves the personal, the social and the intellectual transition of individual learners. In some instances learners need assistance with academics, and will work on writing skills:

"...try to get the students involved in student services that are in place already, you know, writing center, the employment center, just in creating some relationships there, because a lot of times our Aboriginal students come in and they're just not very sure of what to do. That transition to university life for a lot of students [who] have never left their communities before, —students have gone to school in their communities, an all Native school or whatever, and it's kind of funny because the students that come from Aboriginal schools seem to have a very strong sense of self and maybe don't require as much assistance socially, but they do require assistance academically."

However, there is more to academics than working on writing skills. The engagement with learning has to do with Aboriginal learners' social connections and the places where their identities were shaped. Leaving the home community

may involve a move from the cultural identity of the Reserve, the extended family, the geographic shift and cultural shift into a university environment. In this instance, Shawna refers to students with a “strong sense of self”, who require help in their learning.

For other Aboriginal students, this move from their community can convey a sense of disconnection, cultural “drift”, and a loss of belonging. There may be questions about self confidence, and the need to address racism:

“...from our students that are coming from public schools, their academics are usually fairly strong but socially and culturally, there seems to be a bit of less self confidence and stuff like that. So I try to do much to address both of those needs, I try to get as many events and things that are going on already, like the ‘Run against Racism’.”

The need for connection and participation is important. There are community events such as the “Run against Racism”, which is an example of an activity where the students have a common bond – an association with a cause that has meaning to them.

Participation in a collective sense provides a cultural milieu that is about “being” Aboriginal. A sense of community can emerge away from home.

“And a lot of our students, ... maybe they don’t agree with whatever events we put on, like we do a Powwow in October and there are lots of students that couldn’t give two figs about drumming and dancing or whatever. But because it represents who they **are** as Aboriginal students they embrace it a little bit more and are proud of the fact that this big event is going on.”

Pride in one’s own cultural identity is a key component. Even when the students are not particularly invested in a practice such as drumming or dancing, they are still committed to the events that represent Aboriginal culture. This influences them in their social, personal lives within the university. There is a cultural pride in the identity of Aboriginal students.

Shawna had the support of a colleague in her work. This was a mentor who listened to Shawna and there was a space for them to share their stories and goals. Shawna and her colleague worked together on an Equity Committee –a place where goals and objectives were shared.

“I believe that it’s important to have an equity policy in place to protect the people that work here, but also to protect our students and to make sure that services like mine and ___ continues, so that we can ensure that our students receive the best Student Services and academic experience that we can.”

However the role of such a committee was political and sometimes contentious. While the policy and the Equity committee attempted to provide the “best Student Services”, this was not always the case.

In spite of good intentions, there continue to be barriers for Aboriginal learners. Services are not always culturally aware or sensitive. Students might seek help, and leave with a sense that they are lacking –they feel “bad”. In the

following example, Student Services provides a functional service, but fails to provide this in a culturally supportive way:

“I’ve had students indicate to me that there are areas of Student Services that do need to be more aware of cultural issues and to be more sensitive. I’ve mentioned the centre already, a lot of our students have difficulty writing term papers and essays and things like that —and the few that have utilised that service have come away not feeling very helped, like whoever they dealt with didn’t really understand them culturally, so they don’t really take away the best part of the service that they think would have. They may have gotten some good structural information but they’ve come away feeling a little bit bad about themselves.”

In Canadian universities, there has been a great deal of discourse surrounding the nature of cultural awareness in Student Services and other services to students. This discourse has become difficult in the context of tensions regarding integration, assimilation, and critiques of culture. Most Canadian universities have Aboriginal advisors who provide support to students. However, the structure of the university is such that an office of Student Services may not necessarily liaise with the Aboriginal advisors.

In an earlier work (Chan, 2007), another Aboriginal woman Susan told her story, which resonated with the stories of Jim and Shawna. Susan spoke about the tensions she experienced with Eurocentric culture, how she was resisting that culture, and attempting to maintain her own culture. Further, Susan talked about what it meant for her to work on her Master’s degree -- and whether she could do this within the culture of the academy, in a mainstream university.

“How, how much do you [the university] understand? How much are you going to be able to let me move forth in my education, maintaining my own culture and trying to understand that this is an integral part of me ...? (p 88)”

Aboriginal learners experience strains and challenges in maintaining their culture. While participating in Aboriginal cultural events is reasonably well accepted, the response from the university staff is different when it comes to challenging their traditional, dominant practices.

Concluding Thoughts

Aboriginal identity shapes the learning journey for many students in Canada. This journey is contextualised by a history of colonialism, assimilation and residential schools. These contexts follow the learners into the university experience. The university then, is a powerful vehicle where identity can be further sustained, or can be marginalized by institutional discourses.

This research raises questions and implications for learning in institutions with regard to racial identity in every day practice. Learning takes place at the personal, social, and political level –as well as the academic, intellectual level. Furthermore, there is a culture to the university that is not uniformly

experienced (Read, Archer & Leathwood, 2003). Aboriginal learners such as Jim and Shawna might argue that this lack of uniformity is a good thing – a diversity of experiences and identities. At the same time, their stories reflect the flux in the lives of learners who are developing and reinforcing their identities through their individual and collective experiences in the university.

Dominant discourses may construct a sense of “otherness” and this is evidenced in the practicalities of the Jay Treaty and the lack of culturally appropriate Student Services. The absence of visual images that are relevant to Aboriginal culture is also a process of “othering”. There is no sense of belonging in a university that does not have images reflecting one’s own self and group identity. All of these examples influence the learning for Aboriginal students in these two universities. For Jim and Shawna, some of these practices are alien and unsettling. While Jim is no longer called a “foreigner”, there is the residual effect of being treated as if he is from the outside, and does not belong. For Shawna, she is trying to facilitate a process whereby she can support Aboriginal learners to find connection and community. If she does not assist in this process, it is not clear that any one else will provide advocacy or support to Aboriginal students.

Freire (1970) and hooks (1990) suggest “naming” as a step to empowerment, and as a way of challenging power. Resisting the dominant institutional discourse is also a strategy for change. Speaking out and resistance are actions with purpose, actions with knowledge, and therefore forms of agency (Giddens, 1984). The voices of Jim and Shawna were forms of individual agency, but hearing their voices requires individuals in the university who will listen.

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25. IDENTITY FORMATIONS AND LEARNING NARRATIVES: THE STORY OF A ZIMBABWEAN REFUGEE IN THE UK

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Introduction

Refugees have to adjust to ruptures that unexpectedly modify the structure and the meaning of their lives as adults. Uprooted from former communities, culture, work and language they are stripped of aspects of their previous identity. The process of migration disrupts what Alheit and Dausien (2002) refer to as their 'biographical stock of knowledge' and they are forced to learn new behaviours, understand new rules and to adapt to new values and another type of social organisation. Becoming a refugee is therefore a source of deep learning as they confront unexpected changes in their life plans and the need to reshape their lives and reconstruct their identities.

This paper follows the story of Patricia, a Black Zimbabwean teacher over her first six years in the UK as she makes the transition to living and working in the UK. Using life history and biographical methods the study seeks to connect her struggle to establish herself in a new context with processes of learning and identity (re)formations. Her story illuminates how gender, race, class, educational background and other concerns such as worker and economic provider intersect and collaborate to provide the sources for identity construction and self-narration. Alongside these sources of self is the social category and identity of refugee. The label refugee is extremely powerful and emotive. It is not only a bureaucratic status used to define a category of people, their rights, entitlements and experience, but also defines the identity and subjectivity of those people (O'Neil and Spybey 2003). Overwhelmingly the label is tied up with notions of victims, dependency, displacement, loss of homeland, loss of identity and lack of status. Much of this negative association is reinforced and amplified by political and popular discourses which represent refugees as a 'burden' on an overstretched welfare system, as a security threat, and as a feared 'other', threatening national identity and social cohesion (Castles 2003, Lynn and Lea 2003, Yuval-Davis et al. 2005, Bloch and Schuster 2005). This fear is reflected in increasing racial intolerance shown against migrants and refugees across Europe (Zetter 2007), and I would argue increasingly assimilationist approaches to social integration.

Alongside such hostility and marginalisation, refugees have to contend with what Zetter (1991 and 2007) refers to as bureaucratic labelling processes. As refugees are arriving in large numbers at Europe's borders there has been a fractioning of the refugee label by northern governments who are using labelling for instrumental purposes. Through the proliferation of new and often pejorative labels and sub-labels, including 'genuine refugee', 'asylum seeker', 'bogus asylum seeker' 'dispersed asylum seeker', and a range of labels indicating temporary refugee status (e.g. 'Indefinite Leave to Remain', 'Humanitarian Leave to Remain'), the UK government is effectively containing entry and restricting

access to the labour market, education, welfare benefits and other entitlements of citizenship. The new labels are created in political and policy discourse and reveal what Zetter term ‘the political in the apolitical’ (Zetter 2007: 188).

Refugees, like Patricia, may move through complex processes of sequential labelling (Zetter 2007), and at each stage they have to learn to live with, manage and in some cases subvert the different identities and statuses which they are assigned and about which they have no choice.

It is against these wider social, political and public discourses and concerns that refugees learn to live, work and raise their families in the UK. This social and cultural context will shape their experiences and the strategies available to them to negotiate and rebuild their identity. Before exploring Patricia’s story the next section considers how we might conceptualise and theorise identity.

Theorising identity

Most social theorists subscribe to a multifaceted and fluid conception of identity. Identities are fundamentally temporal and permanently shifting; they are the product of specific historical, cultural and institutional sites within specific discursive formations (Hall 1996). Brah (2007) for example, argues that identity is a relationship; it is not something fixed ‘that we carry around with ourselves like a piece of luggage’ (2007: 143). Parekh (2007) similarly rejects what he terms a ‘credit card view’ of identity where individuals are said to possess multiple identities and select which ones to emphasise depending on the context. Like Brah he argues that identities are forms of relationship and are constantly in the making. He makes the point that different identities may conflict, interact and shape each other. Not all identities are equally important and different identities play different roles, how we define and relate our identity to others is a complex mix of self understanding and the way we are treated by the wider society. In her discussion of the multiplicity of identity Wetherell (2007) also draws attention to the range of potential identities individuals may draw upon, including gender, parental status, generation and so on. She suggests that ‘[a]lliances of shorter and longer duration can form and dissolve around all the possible bases on which people might be united and divided’ (2007: 11).

The narrative resources which are used to define the self are not of the individual’s own making, but are borrowed from the socially available ‘ontological narratives’ (Chappell et al. 2003) or ‘scripts’ (Goodson 2006). A focus on the available ontological narratives and scripts for different groups, and how these are shaped and constrained highlights the working of power in identity formation. Chappell et al. (2003) draw upon Foucault’s ideas of power as residing in all discourses (Foucault 1980 and 1983) and argue that:

“...our conception of who we are, our identity, is constituted by the power of all of the discursive practices in which we speak and which in turn ‘speak’ us (2003: 41).”

They make the point that narratives and the identities they conjure can only exist in socially constituted discourses that embody ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault 1980). It is these discourses which determine which kinds of narratives will socially predominate and which will be considered unacceptable, subordinate

or unavailable to certain groups or individuals. Dominant narratives work with practices of inclusion and exclusion that enable them to retain their dominance. Some narratives may impose themselves on an individual's identity more than others, and some people might be socially compelled to define themselves against some identities over others.

Bringing an understanding of the power of discourse to identity formation enables us to explore identity not as a process through which individuals choose and select particular identities for themselves depending on particular times and circumstances, rather it enables the focus on the wider discourses of power and how these shape and constrain the available ontological narratives or scripts. It draws attention to the processes by which identities are either privileged or marginalised, and how different practices work to legitimise particular identities and not others. For refugees understanding identity as narrative enables us to explore how identity is reconstructed from social scripts which are imposed upon them, such as the label of refugee; also what other scripts and identity positions are perceived to be available and how they are negotiated. At the same time the identity strategies adopted need to consider the social and cultural context which constrain the 'choice' of script. For example whether skills and qualifications gained from the country of origin are recognised and therefore validate aspects of previous identity; language and cultural barriers, discrimination, financial barriers to re-training will all impose upon and restrict identity strategies.

While it is clear that refugees are enmeshed within structures of power and domination, and as a social category they are constructed as marginalised and dependent. Perhaps more than any other social group they have identities and labels imposed upon them which circumscribe agency, and shape and constrain the narratives and identity strategies available to them. However, within these discourses there is human agency, resourcefulness, non-compliance and sometimes subversion of the dominant scripts.

This paper draws on empirical data collected as part of my Education Doctorate at the University of Sussex, UK. Five semi-structured, life history interviews have been conducted with Patricia since we first met in 2004. This paper explores her journey through the asylum process in the UK, and narratives around working and learning. By selecting these stories to reconstruct here and not others I am inevitably foregrounding some identities, while ignoring other, equally important identities such as those of mother, daughter, Zimbabwean etc. These, no less important identities and roles, belong to other stories to be reconstructed at other times.

Life in Zimbabwe

Patricia was brought up in Zimbabwe, the eldest of eight children. Her mother was a primary school teacher and her father was a head teacher. She describes the high value attached to education and the high standards of discipline expected in school.

“Education was very, very important. You had to be educated to be somebody. So they obviously didn't want you to obtain education which is equal to them, they want you to do much better. So expectation was

always high. If you are lucky and your children are intelligent you don't have a problem. It's only when your children aren't as intelligent as you want them to be that it becomes a disappointment because you think what will I do with them. Because it is really difficult in Zimbabwe to think of how else someone can make a living without education, there is nothing you can do without education except maybe marry well or marry high... No matter how young you are parents are always emphasising how important education is. Always. You just go there very eager to learn as you know your life depends on that teacher there and so even the teachers, regardless of age, you expect the children to want to learn and to be in school. They are eager. You walk into the classroom and you expect children to just stop talking because you are there. Because you are there they expect you to say something, they don't just carry on chatting."

At eighteen Patricia started a three year teacher training course. She compared both the material and non-material benefits and advantages of the teaching profession:

"It is very respected as a job because everybody knows you have to go through training...We had two homes, one provided by school where we would be most of the term, then we had our own house where we would go to in the holiday. So it was almost a luxury which some professions didn't have. We didn't need transport because we lived at school. Break time, teatime, lunchtime we would go home and have tea...I could always go home and feed the baby and come back, so the convenience was there for teachers, and we had these five-week holidays."

Patricia worked as a primary school teacher in Zimbabwe for 11 years. She married a teacher and they had three children. As was usual among professional classes in Zimbabwe, Patricia returned to work after the birth of her babies, employing maids to care for the children and the home. She describes her life style as being 'luxurious'; she could dedicate herself to her teaching work while leaving all the domestic work to the maids.

"Of course the maids would have two or three weeks off during the holidays to go away. So that was the two or three weeks that I was alone with my children. But otherwise I never had the chance to actually run the home myself or run the house myself and make sure the children had eaten. And sometimes I would do the washing may be three days before the maid came back because I didn't want her to find loads and loads of washing. What impression do you give if you are always saying 'Oh do this, do that' and then you don't do it yourself!"

Her life history in Zimbabwe with its emphasis on education achievement and her positive disposition to learning were an important source of self which she later draws upon when confronted with racial prejudice.

Arrival narrative: imposed and secret identities

Patricia came to the UK in August 2002, part of the latest of three waves of migration from Zimbabwe since independence in 1980 (Bloch 2008). The

latest migrants have come to the UK in the context of the ever deepening political and economic crisis and are part of the exodus of professional and middle classes from the country (McGregor 2007). Patricia arrived on her own leaving her husband and three children who were then aged twelve, seven and five in Zimbabwe. Her arrival narrative describes the fluidity of immigration statuses and labels that she moves through in her first year here, and how she negotiated the identities imposed upon her. She had planned to apply for asylum as soon as she arrived in UK. However, when she was at the airport she couldn't bring herself to declare that she was seeking asylum.

"I just couldn't do it at the airport. I thought 'Oh my goodness, no I can't do this!' So the person at the counter actually asked 'You're from Zimbabwe, things there are not very good'. I said 'Yeah things are not very good'. 'Are you visiting somebody?' I don't know why, but I just said 'yes'. I remember I was given one month. I came out and I didn't even have anywhere to go. I had one month visa."

Patricia had one telephone number, that of someone her sister had met when she was in the UK eleven years before. Through this contact she ended up sharing a room with a Zimbabwean woman in Brighton. But even then it took her four months to summon the courage to apply. Her reluctance was compounded by the stories told by her flat mate who advised her against it:

"She was just like 'But what if you are denied? And what if you are detained? And maybe you won't be able to call your family from one of those centres. And people don't know when people have been detained and people are held in circumstances which are not very human.' And I thought that 'Oh my goodness I'm going to go to jail now'. She was describing it like she had been there and she had some, someone who had been. So it took me some time."

In the period before applying for asylum Patricia found paid employment with care agencies and care homes. The area of work is not surprising as it is the largest single occupational categories for Zimbabweans in the UK (Bloch 2005, cited in McGregor 2007). Privatisation and contracting out have created unstable and insecure employment conditions and low wages which have increased the importance of migrants in this area of work. It is an industry where 'informal recruitment practices' have flourished enabling newly arrived migrants to work, but also allowing for their exploitation (McGregor 2007: 803).

She was aware that with an expired visitor's visa it was illegal to work but felt she had no choice. She had arrived in the UK with 375GBP and had to pay rent, bills and buy food. When she applied for a job she would tell the employer that she had sent her passport to the Home Office and was waiting for it to be returned. Every week her employer would ask for her passport and every week Patricia would say that it was with the Home Office. After a few months, when the employers became too persistent, she would leave that agency and start the process again with a new employer.

"Yes it was illegal, it was illegal. That's what I'm saying I'm not sure whether they didn't know that this was illegal because obviously they didn't even see my passport, but they still gave me a job."

Patricia finally did apply for asylum which was a relief as it made her feel slightly 'more legal'. However, as an asylum seeker she did not receive welfare benefits was not eligible to work. So she had to continue her precarious and illegal employment.

"I think I was more anxious before I had I filed for asylum, I was more anxious because you are an illegal somebody. It is worse than being an asylum seeker who was waiting a decision, you are, you know it is illegal and the employer possibly knows it is illegal, and the pay rates were very low as well. Very low as well. So you could just afford to... I remember my husband writing a letter and saying 'If it's that bad you why don't you just come back and maybe we could go to South Africa or we could go to Botswana or some other neighbouring country if it's really bad there'. My goodness there's no way I'm gonna go back, there is no way I'm gonna go back...I still had to do that [illegal work], I had to do something. And people back home, I mean 6 or 7 months down the line and you're still not sending any money. It doesn't go down well, you know? My husband wouldn't have managed anyway on his one salary when we used to have two salaries...Every day you thank God after every shift because you know because you've worked you're going to be paid for it. After every shift you thank God because that's something at the end of the month. I didn't even have a bank account, I was using this lady, who I used to live with, I was using her bank account. She gave me her card, so I was using her card at the ATM...Not even anybody back home can ever imagine me or anyone doing that. Even my husband doesn't understand that. He came and everything was just done. There's no way you can actually make anyone understand what you went through. There's no way. The lies that you tell, the anxiety, oh goodness, it was really... its funny looking back now and you think 'My goodness, how did I do all that, how did I get away with that?...It is a very long time to wait. You don't want to go back there to being an illegal and having... your boss there asking for your passport every other week or every other day. Oh my goodness, how long can it take?"

In fact it took three months for the Home Office to grant her refugee status. This new ascribed identity of refugee gave her legal access to the labour market and better rates of pay; it also meant an end to her vulnerable and insecure status in the UK. However, both asylum seeker and refugee were identities associated with embarrassment and secrecy.

"It's funny, British people are not very friendly to asylum seekers so it's not something that you just lay on the table and say 'Oh I'm an asylum seeker, I've got problems at home'. You don't. Like I said I never got any benefit I don't even know why. But people have the impression that asylum seekers get all these benefits and they don't go to work and they get all this free housing...it is embarrassing, I still feel that. I don't tell anybody. On official forms, when they ask for immigration status, that's the only place you tick the 'refugee', because obviously they need to know that you can work. Everywhere else, no, no. I never tell anyone unless I have to do because otherwise people start to look

at you differently. They start looking at you as if you are someone who is benefiting from the state and not giving anything, you know? So you wouldn't want people to look at you like that cos you're not benefiting anything as such, you are also contributing to whatever you are doing. It's not like you're getting weekly or monthly benefits or living in a house for free."

As she moved through the sequence of imposed identities of undocumented migrant, asylum seeker and finally refugee her choices and activities were differentially constrained and identities were transformed. As an undocumented migrant and asylum seeker she subverted these identities by working illegally. Effectively she, like a great many migrants, was coerced into becoming a circumstantial law breaker and liar; identities and behaviour which were very far from anything she could have imagined prior to coming to the UK. It is an example of state policy effectively criminalising refugees seeking asylum (Zetter 2007).

Patricia conflates both asylum seeker and refugee as identities to be ashamed of and kept hidden. Her depiction of the negative and stereotyped images surrounding these identities echoes Zetter's point that the asylum seeker label transforms an identity into a politicised image; it is not a neutral way of describing the world, but has the covert intention to '... convey an image of marginality, dishonesty, a threat, unwelcomed...' (2007: 184). This attempt to define and secure identities is resisted by Patricia who, either consciously or unconsciously, constructs herself in opposition to this script. Her presentation of self, as we shall see, is one of a strong and resilient self. Her narrative emphasises agency, determination and extraordinary hard work, as she manages to provide for herself and her family both in the UK and at home.

Learning and work narratives: catering and care, catering and care

When she first arrived in the UK Patricia had assumed that she would continue her profession as a teacher. She had looked at teaching salaries and compared to what she was earning in Zimbabwe thought that she'd 'be very rich in a very short time'. However, her Zimbabwean teaching qualifications were not recognised in the UK and she was required to do further training and a placement in a school. Having observed in a school she decided against re-training.

"...initially when I came I was actually excited about doing the teaching because, because I didn't have any other skills. So I thought well teaching is going to be it. So, and then I realised that although I had a diploma I couldn't really use it here, I had to do two years I think or a year in a school and it wasn't easy to get in a school. I did try, I did try, somebody was helping me and I just went to observe one school but they didn't really need anybody to come in and do any kind of placement there, or they didn't want anybody really....And, and then I, well maybe I didn't try hard enough really, and after my observation unfortunately I went to a school that was not very, the discipline wasn't so good, so it wasn't really motivating, it didn't really, say, make me

want to do it. So I thought well, I did a bit of catering through an agency, weddings and all that. I did a bit of care, it was just both really, catering and care, catering and care.“

It took two years for her children and husband to get permission to join her in the UK. Her strategy during these first two years on her own was to work extraordinarily hard. She not only wanted to earn as much money as she could, but working long hours helped her to stop dwelling too much on the pain of separation from her family. She describes how, because she was living on her own there was nothing to do at home; she could have three jobs, sometimes four jobs at one time. During those first two years she managed to save 6000 GBP from her low paid jobs. This was on top of sending regular economic remittances back to her mother, her husband and children, and sometimes her in-laws in Zimbabwe.

“I was getting a lot of money but I was putting every God given hour into it, into work. Because this full time job that I had, I actually went onto nights after a year I think, I went over to nights because you did three nights in succession and then you were off for six nights because there were three of us... So those six days I would maybe sleep the first day and the next five days I would be working different places. Yeah, so I almost like had another full time job outside that other full time job.... I did a bit of cleaning. Like if I was doing my nights I would come back at about half past 8 to do cleaning from 9am to 1pm, then take another shift 8pm to 2am and then go back to my night and... I know! I know. It was, it was, I mean the fact that you knew that you were saving for your children to come and, you know, not want for anything and all that. The thing was the motivator I think. You almost felt guilty if you went home to sleep. What am I doing sleeping? I could be out there making some money! It's a good thing I never really fell ill; somehow my body can manage to sustain all that stress for some reason....And catering was very stressful because we did weddings, they are very social functions and we are so far away from home and some family enjoying themselves and you are on your feet for like 10 hours. So yeah that was the main reason why I gave that up...They were very social gatherings, for the people it was OK because it was a bit of money because you were doing like 12 or 13 hours, but for me the stress of being there and watching other people enjoying themselves, really families, and I was just on my own. It was just too much...I was really alone, yeah in the literal sense of being on my own.”

On the other hand Patricia enjoyed care work, and in particular working with elderly patients. It gave her an opportunity to take responsibility and care for other people and went some way to filling the void left by the separation from her own children. Her narrative of care work did not reflect on any stigma attached to care work in the Zimbabwean community found in other studies (McGregor 2007).

“Q: What is it that you like about the care work?”

A: The care work? I think maybe having been a teacher you want people to kind of appreciate what you are doing or maybe kind of be needed in a way. If you are a parent as well you are used to being

needed, you are used to caring. So that need, that kind of deficit that you are, kind of, you know, feeling, you know, you just feel, well you go home and think 'well I think I did a good job today'. It was kind of really the fulfilling bit really."

As agency staff her position was precarious and she was dependent on her ability to do the tasks she was asked to do. However, this was difficult as she had no experience of domestic or care work. She felt vulnerable because she knew that if she made mistakes or asked too many questions this would be fed back to the agency and she would not get further work. She felt she had to present a confident image that suggested that she knew what she was doing. She dreaded being asked about where she'd worked previously as she had to lie. There was no formal training provided at any of the care homes or catering venues she was employed at. Learning was very much 'on the job' and through social interaction with other staff and patients.

"[S]o you just look at other people and do what they're doing. That is how, because, I had absolutely no idea, like, when these agencies sent me to places I had never been before, I had never been to a place like that and I didn't even know where the wheelchair brakes, I didn't even know where the wheelchair breaks were [laughing]. Oh my goodness, yeah but because you are not employed there that was actually the way I learnt because you just went there maybe once and, you know, make a few mistakes here and there but you learn and then the next shift you are more confident and I had no, absolutely no idea, never seen a pad in my life, never seen anything, a commode, in my life and this agency, they didn't ask about your experience, they needed people so much that they just took you. You say I want to try and well they just send you there and then you do whatever.

So it was just like learning from, I mean even the catering jobs, I had never done that but it is something that you just hold a tray and just follow the next person in front of you and...But I think with the catering, the lady that I used to share a flat with kind of explained to me, you know, the way that you put your plates or which side you are approaching the table and all that. So I had a bit of coaching before I went for that job because...but it is not like something that you practice at home, you just, when you go you don't want to be the first person out. You want to be the last person so that you can observe the others [laughing]. Yeah, oh yeah, it was a sort of learning curve really. You would have fun sometimes, giggling about a few things here and there and maybe go home and cry about what you would do. Cry 'Oh my God what am I doing with myself?

Now, now I am a senior carer...Well not officially but I am senior enough to know what I am doing. There are very few things that I don't know, that I haven't met before and because you know it can be a new thing and you are confident enough to ask now, you don't just want to look or maybe make a mistake so you can always ask: Oh I have never done this before, you know, how do I do that?...Yeah, it is OK [now] not to know, it is OK to say you don't know, you know? You can't know

everything. But when you are starting you think: 'Oh, I don't know this'. There is too much that you don't know so you don't want people to know that you don't know that much. Yeah. I mean your life depends on it, that is where your rent is going to come from so if you make a mistake and you lose your job so then what? You try a bit too hard I suppose."

Patricia's identity in the workplace was not singular or static. She was both worker and learner, what Chappell et al. (2003) refer to as a hybrid worker-learner identity, with learning embedded in the relations either with her fellow workers or in some cases with the patients themselves. It was a risky and insecure identity which she constantly feared would be exposed. Her description of learning on the job underlines the essentially social character of learning and how learning occurs through participating in communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). As newcomers become more skilled and knowledgeable they move centripetally towards full participation and become old timers, or what Patricia refers to as '*senior care worker*'. The centripetal movement in the community of practice to full membership and competency involves a shift in identity (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). For Patricia, her identity becomes one of competent care worker, capable and confident enough to ask questions where necessary rather than having to lie to cover up her lack of experience and knowledge. To paraphrase Wenger, and viewing identity as a form of competency, she has moved into 'familiar territory' where what was 'foreign', 'opaque', 'unwieldy' and 'unproductive', becomes 'familiar', 'understandable', 'usable' and 'negotiable' (1998: 153). As a consequence Patricia's sense of self is transformed, not only in relation to her ability to do the job, but also in relation to her fellow workers. With a new sense of social confidence she was no longer prepared to endure the racial prejudices of some of her fellow care workers. She was able to start negotiating a new identity, which ultimately would lead her back into formal education.

Becoming a student: changing identity and challenging prejudice

After several years of care work Patricia decided to study and qualify as a Mental Health Nurse. Her sense of the poor discipline in UK schools compared to Zimbabwe had persuaded her not to re-train as a teacher, and she felt that mental health nurse training would provide a route into caring in a professional capacity with more remuneration and higher status. Assuming the identity of learner was also a way of overcoming racial prejudice and the low expectations that other care workers had of her. She describes agency work as an environment where people 'tend to take advantage of other people'. It was not necessarily, or always, on grounds of race, but also by virtue of being new in a place compared to permanent staff. As agency staff you were treated with less respect and given the worst jobs to do. This echoes McGregor's findings of the 'friction' between temporary staff who are predominantly African or other migrants and the predominantly white permanent staff (McGregor 2007). However, race and the low expectations that other care workers had of her as a Black African was a significant motivating factor in her decision to return to study. For her, drawing

on previous educational achievement and returning to education was a way of transforming her identity and proving her abilities.

“[W]hen you go into workplaces because not only are you African, but you are also Black, people don’t expect you to, to have any kind of education. So you are always out to prove yourself which is really what motivated me into [mental health nursing]. There was a time when I was comfortable with my care jobs, earning enough to send home and look after myself. But then I thought every place you go you have to prove yourself and you can always take out your certificates and say ‘Well, I’ve got O-levels, I’ve got a teaching diploma, I’ve got A-levels’. You can always do that. It’s really stressful to always try to say ‘I’m not what you expect or what you think’, so the only way was to be in education yourself to be professional and then people don’t question you. They don’t question your ability because they know you’re going through the education process. Because it’s really difficult out there when you go to places and even the basic things people think you don’t know that or they ask ‘Are there things like this in Zimbabwe?’ Or ‘Can you write the simple reports for what happened to the residents?’ and you think ‘Yes: I can write! I can spell!’ It is that you have to prove yourself. If you’re doing a care job where you don’t need any qualifications how are you proving yourself? That is one thing I realised.”

When her fellow care workers treated her as if she did not know anything, she would ‘*pull out that nursing training course card*’. Being a student and returning to education, even though in a different country, was an enjoyable and straight forward process for her:

“I didn’t really doubt my academic ability because that is what I am, I am an academic, I like the reading, the essays, the exams, all that...I like the enrichment of being on the receiving end...”

Patricia managed to pay her course fees and combine her full time study with working and supporting her family. She graduated in summer 2008 and at the time of writing is continuing care work while looking for employment as a mental health nurse.

Concluding comments

Refugees like Patricia are faced with having to re-establish their lives in new and unfamiliar contexts. Some aspects of their ‘biographically acquired landscape of knowledge’ (Alheit and Dausien 2002: 15) are transferable and relevant, for example Patricia’s confidence and feelings around formal learning gave her the ‘educational capital’ to confront racism in the work place. In other ways the process of migration marks a rupture in biographicity, precipitating profound and often deeply unsettling new learning and identity changes. This learning and identity construction takes place within the harsh structures and discourses of the asylum system. Despite attempts to impose and constrain the narratives and identity strategies available, Patricia’s story illustrates resourcefulness, human agency and non-compliance as she has struggled to rebuild a new life for herself and her family.

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IV. LITERACY

26. ADULT LITERACIES, LEARNING LIVES AND LEARNER IDENTITIES

Kathy Maclachlan, Lyn Tett, Jim Crowther and Stuart Hall

Introduction

This chapter is based on a recent research project (Maclachlan et al, 2008) that investigated the key organisational and pedagogical factors that enabled participants in adult literacy and numeracy programmes to achieve positive learning outcomes. It will draw on this research in order to examine the individual, organisational and pedagogical factors that contributed to the participants having positive educational experiences and achieving their learning goals as well as the lessons this provides more generally for literacies work.

Observations and interviews were conducted in eight case study organisations catering for a broad range of adult literacy and numeracy (ALN) learners and encompassing a variety of types of ALN provision. They included a numeracy group, communication skills for homeless adults and recovering addicts, embedded literacies within an 'Introduction to Care' course, a football group, a reading and writing group for disabled adults, basic skills for adults with learning difficulties, and an open access dedicated ALN programme. Observation sessions and interviews were conducted with eight tutors and 47 adult learners from the case studies. Learners' ages ranged from the early twenties to late fifties, and there was a slight gender imbalance in favour of males.

These case studies exemplified three types of learning contexts; 1) dedicated, stand alone ALN provision, where adults come for around two hours per week tuition with the expressed purpose of enhancing their literacies skills, 2) embedded provision where the literacies learning is amalgamated into courses related to particular interests, for example, football, and 3) holistic support contexts where literacies learning, be it dedicated or embedded, forms just one part of a whole network of support services available for vulnerable, 'at risk' adults. In this latter group some were homeless, living in temporary accommodation as a result of very varied circumstances and trying to regain a foothold back into 'normal' living. Many of them had gone through a very negative, traumatic experience earlier in their lives that had triggered a downward spiral denting their confidence in themselves and their abilities. Their learning was one part of their overall strategy to regain order, control and normality in their lives and successfully negotiate a very difficult transitional process.

Three types of data were gathered from the case studies. Firstly researchers observed classes and recorded the pedagogical and support strategies used as well as the culture and organisation of the group. Secondly tutors were interviewed about their approaches to teaching, learning and assessment and finally learners were interviewed near the beginning of their courses and after

completion of their learning programmes. The interviews with the learners examined: individual life histories including key life events; the influence of key support/learning organisations on their lives; the circumstances in which they were currently situated and their imagined futures; in order to identify the factors that might lead to progression and persistence in learning.

The data from the observations was recorded, notes were made and these were then entered into a database. The interviews with both tutors and learners were taped, transcribed and analysed using 'File-Maker Pro'. In this paper we draw on the observations, the tutor interviews and the first learner interviews to explore firstly the relationship between learning lives and identities and secondly the pedagogy and practices that contributed to learners being able to make the changes in their lives that mattered to them.

Learning lives and identities

The concept of learner identity and the role of learning in (re) shaping identities is receiving increasing attention in the world of adult education (see Morgan-Klein & Osborne 2007, Field & Malcolm, 2003, Schuller et al, 2004, Chappell et al, 2003, Gallacher et al, 2002). Schuller et al (op. cit.) for example suggest that identity is a form of capital akin to human and social capital that can be a resource, albeit an unevenly distributed and discursively shaped resource, for learners. Although there is much debate around the concept of identity (Chappell et al op. cit.), there is nonetheless, common agreement that adult learning can, and often does have a significant role in the formation and re-formation of the identities of learners, for as Schuller et al argue:

“Learning [is] a process whereby people build up –consciously or not– their assets in the shape of human, social and identity capital, and then benefit from the returns on the investment in the shape of better health, stronger social networks, enhanced family life, and so on (2004: 13).”

Morgan-Klein and Osborne (2007) summarise these dual aspects of identity in saying that it;

“represents a resource that individuals can continually draw upon when engaging in learning. At the same time, increased identity capital may also be an *outcome* of engagement in learning (p 16) (original emphasis).”

So identities feed into, and are fed by learning experiences, and both are strongly influenced by the social networks that people belong to, where there is a sense of shared experiences and values amongst network members. Some networks, for a range of very different reasons, may share a positive disposition towards learning, whereas others may share a negative inclination as a result of past educational experiences.

Poor experiences of learning at school are particularly important in influencing this disposition towards learning and the task of overcoming this negativity should not be underestimated, for as Lave & Wenger (1991: 115) argue, ‘learning and a sense of identity are inseparable: they are aspects of the same phenomenon’. A

saddening large proportion of the learners in this study described very negative, damaging experiences of initial education that had caused them to have a poor sense of themselves as learners. These fragile learner identities were forged from their early days for a range of different reasons.

Tracy, for example, remembers finding it difficult at primary school. She was very slow at reading but did not feel that the teachers noticed and thought that they were ‘...more interested in the bright ones, the ones that could get on...They sort of just left me to one side... I tried to do me best, but I just felt that because I wasn’t bright and I wasn’t brainy that people just didn’t want to know.’

Many recalled memories of bullying and harassment that affected their ability to learn because they felt neither safe nor secure in learning environments that should have nurtured, not alienated them, so they turned away from their schools either physically or psychologically. Bullying from teachers was a factor that shaped Mark’s memories of education. ‘In English and Maths classes if you got picked on by the teacher...and when you got it wrong - you got hit. So there was fear - no one would put up their hand unless you were 100% sure, and that marks you.’

Traumatic experiences in educational environments were not the sole causes of school failure however. Many rejected schooling because they either did not recognise its value at the time or were raised in violent, unloving homes that were neglectful of their educational and social welfare. Kate’s experience exemplifies this vividly:

“My mum left when I was 6 weeks old and me dad brought me up but he re-married and I wasn’t treated nice by my stepmother. I don’t remember any happy times, birthdays, family times, holidays or even ordinary cuddles. There was just no discipline there so I ended up going off the rails and started drinking and then I started sniffing glue.”

However, it would be wrong to assume that all literacies learners come to their learning bearing the burden of negative schooling experiences. Over a third of the learners in our study recalled their school days with pleasure and many of these achieved well academically. At some stage between school and the present however, many of their lives had plummeted in a downward spiral through alcohol, drugs, crime, abuse or a combination of these. For example, Noel, a recovering heroin user, told us; *‘I loved drugs but they took me to places I don’t want to go back to, like getting food from bins and sleeping in the streets’*. He decided he could not go any lower and wanted to get off heroin so went on a methadone programme and from there, to his current recovery programme.

A phenomenon that several of these adults, recovering from addiction, depression or similar experiences commented on was the effect of these traumas on their skills and competencies. They had lost, albeit temporarily, some of the basic abilities that were previously second nature to them. For example, Irene said:

“You don’t realise that because of the drugs, it all goes. All the stuff you knew and just did like money, calculating and organising, it all goes out of your mind and you have to start to learn it all, all over again.”

Another learner, a highly successful business consultant whose company crashed on the stock market, lost everything, began drinking heavily and, in his words:

“...went downhill very fast...I suffered from depression, my health was bad and I did nothing apart from vegetate. I didn’t read a paper or add 2 and 2 in eight years and was brain dead.”

Recovering from addiction and its attendant problems does not, however, describe the life circumstances and practices of all learners in this study. Many were working, in stable relationships, bringing up children and living as ordinary members of their communities. Nevertheless, what most had in common was a turning point in their lives; they were working through some form of transition that had brought them into their ALN programme. John, for example, worked in an airport and came to realise that any career advancement would be dependent upon him improving his numeracy skills. His current job would not enable himself and his fiancée to buy the house they wanted, so to make the change, he recognised he had to return to learning. Tracy and Ann were experiencing parenting difficulties and similarly recognised the role that learning could play in helping to negotiate them. Several of the learners were recent immigrants to Scotland and were adjusting to a new language, customs and the difficult path into employment, so came to learning to help them through this period of adjustment. Crises or transitions have long been recognised as significant triggers to engagement in learning (Cross 1981, McGivney 1990) and many of the learners’ lives in the study fitted into this category. They envisaged and were using their learning as a means of enabling them to negotiate their transitions and assume a different identity; to come closer to being the person they aspired to be, –a good parent, addiction free, a worker and an independent adult.

The learners brought with them a very diverse range of past life experiences and current life circumstances. What bound them together in spite of this diversity were very fragile or negative senses of themselves as learners. And though the creation of this low learner identity had very different origins, its significance for the learning programme cannot be overemphasised. A second commonality amongst them was a marginalisation from ‘normal’, mainstream society and the loss of self-esteem that this produced. At some stage in the past, their experiences of addiction, disability, immigration, worklessness etc. had caused them to identify themselves as other than ‘normal’ in the eyes of society and their engagement in learning was part of their efforts to counter both of these issues.

Barton and colleagues (2007) argue that someone who has experienced a lifelong history of problems with education and who is currently living in very difficult circumstances may not be in a position to imagine any sort of long term future, and engagement in learning may therefore seem pointless. This might lead to resistance to any sort of formal learning, or ‘alternatively may lead to a “compliant” attitude whereby they go along with any choice that is offered to them with little personal investment’ (Barton et al, 2007, 24). Most of the projects that we studied, however, had gone to great lengths to ensure that participants were there because they had actively chosen to participate in order to change some aspect of their lives and identities. We found that becoming a learner was the product of the complex interplay between the ‘social and

economic structures that shape people's lives, the educational institutions which determine the processes of engagement with learning, and the learners themselves' (Crossan et al 2003: 58). In order to explore this further we examine the pedagogy and practice that contributed to learners' persistence in learning and hence their ability to affect the changes that matter to them.

Pedagogy and practice

This section of the paper draws on the observation notes made during classes as well as the interviews with the learners and tutors. In the text **CS** refers to the case study and **Obs** to the notes from the observation of classes.

Learners and tutors in all the case studies spoke about the importance of easily accessible environments that pertained both to the centres in which the programmes took place and the classes themselves. 'It was easy to come along here as I just phoned up and then saw the organiser who asked me about what I could do. If it had been more difficult I don't think I would have come along.' (learner CS 1).

However, for some of the learners, especially those with chaotic lifestyles, the step from non-engagement to participation in structured learning was too difficult to negotiate in one go. They needed sustained informal, 'drop in' tuition and guidance to gradually re-introduce them to the world of learning and to a sense of themselves as learners before they were ready to attempt it. The potentially lengthy lead in time needed to support these vulnerable adults into taking this step into structured learning should not be underestimated. For example one of the tutors who had been involved in such work said:

"I spent two years at X developing a relationship with these guys and it took me quite some months in the 'Drop In' facility just to get their confidence and trust and I think that goes a long way to them buying in to it, then going into class sessions, that we're doing now. We couldn't have done that in week one. (tutor CS 4)"

Once learners were engaged, the curriculum was planned to be as flexible as possible, and tutors and learners alike spoke of the importance of this flexibility, which appeared to be one of the determining factors in encouraging learners to persist in their learning. One tutor commented: "There is a lot of variety that she [the student] loves and which makes it really interesting and this helps keep her motivated. Also she is learning what she wants to learn." (tutor CS 2).

In some cases this flexibility was about negotiating individual work with learners and in others it was the group together that decided upon the topic of the session. For example, in the numeracy group it was observed that:

"The provision and curriculum are very flexible and responsive to learners' goals and interests. Each individual has their own goals and these are checked verbally at the beginning and end of the class. Not only is the content of the learning negotiated but also the way in which people learn best is taken into account so that some people have written examples, others verbal feedback and yet others use concrete materials such as rulers, or coins. (Obs. CS1)"

Both learners' and tutors' reflections confirmed the importance and the power of group work in building confidence and a positive learner identity; as the following comments illustrate:

"The group work has helped me to get my confidence back and stay clean....' (learner, CS 7).

The whole group gets on well together and there are no cliques. It gives me a lot of support.(learner, CS 7).

The ... class shows you a good way to put things across, and you don't feel out of place. You're in with the group so you get involved. When there's 3 or 4 of us together in the group, you have to work out tasks, you're communicating with each other and it's very satisfying. (learner, CS 4).

With this group we have done some pair and small group work but they actually prefer to work as a whole group. They know each other's strengths and weaknesses and are supportive of each other because they have faced the same homelessness and addiction issues (tutor, CS 4)."

Our observations and interviews consistently highlighted the importance of the tutors' personalities and attributes in delivering ALN effectively. We observed participatory, enthusiastic, honest and committed tutors engaging with highly diverse, sometimes difficult groups and individuals. We also found a very real sense of enjoyment in their teaching and in their relationships with the learners. They were genuine, they were real and they liked both the work and the adults they worked with. Learners themselves frequently spoke of their appreciation for their tutors and the commitment and support they received from them. For example, one learner reflected:

"I like the informal atmosphere –it makes me feel motivated that the tutors are working so hard to help me. I've already been able to write a letter and have had a good result from it. I feel it's the first time anyone's reacted to anything I've said....It made me feel fantastic, like winning the lottery (learner, CS2)."

Participants in these projects had changed their dispositions to learning partly because of these positive tutor-learner relationships that could and were transforming the learners' identities. They had done this in part by changing 'the relationship between a learner's personal identity, his or her material and cultural surroundings and dispositions to learning' (Hodkinson & Bloomer 2002: 38). The impact of the interaction with the tutor and other students on the social process of identity formation was sensitive to biographical narratives and cultural influences (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2000; Osborn et al, 2003). For example:

"I'm more calm now and seeing different aspects of myself as well. ... I used to be 'loud and proud' when I first started the course, but now I'm quieter and let other people talk. What I used to think and what I think now are two different things (learner, CS 5).

The relationships that are formed with people, and the really comfortable environment that is created in the project, encourages

the service users to persist. A key aspect of this is that people can be really honest about what the issues are for them and they know they are safe and it's a trusting place to be. (tutor, CS 7)"

Learning can also be viewed as participation in social practice whereby newcomers to a particular community are both absorbing, and being absorbed in, the 'culture of practice'. From this perspective significant learning is what changes the ability to engage in practice and to understand why it is done whereby learning arises out of 'the inherently socially negotiated character of meaning ... in, with, and arising from, the socially and culturally structured world' (Lave and Wenger 1991: 51). Such learning is not just the acquisition of memories, habits, and skills, but also the formation of an identity through participating in a new practice or community such that 'we know who we are by what is familiar, understandable, usable, negotiable; we know who we are not by what is foreign, opaque, unwieldy, unproductive' (Wenger, 1998:153). For example:

"Coming here helps me keep on going. I don't think I'm a failure any more.... It's making me feel good doing something I wanted to do for myself. If I don't come I could fall on my arse again. It's boosting my self-esteem, giving me more confidence and helping me know I can get a job. (learner, CS 5).

I have improved on my old self where I was an angry wee man all the time and always fighting. I am getting better at walking away from things rather than trying to get fights started which I did when I was young but I have done all that now and I want to get on with my life (learner, CS 7)."

The process of identity re-formation through engagement in a community of practice was most evident in centres that provided holistic or 'wrap around' support for the learners that included, but was broader than literacies learning. They provided a range of other opportunities for adults to participate in, and become absorbed into their communities and its practices with support from staff that extended beyond the acquisition of literacies skills. What this illustrates is the importance and effectiveness of integrating ALN elements into all other aspects of provision and services that are also geared towards the achievement of learners' life goals. Advice workers, conversant with the ALN programmes, built on the newly acquired literacies skills that homeless adults had gained in helping them to apply for housing; rehabilitation workers were able to build on the oral competencies that they saw learners developing in classes, and workers in the centre for disabled adults encouraged management volunteers who were also learners to write up minutes of meetings. The skills, knowledge and understanding they had gained were immediately and practically helping them to deal with real, challenging tasks in their lives. Conversely, these achievements in form filling, orality and writing were fed back to the ALN tutors in a mutually re-enforcing cycle that undoubtedly enhanced progress and achievement.

In these circumstances, ALN was just one part, albeit a critical one, in the raft of provision on hand to help the adults achieve their life goals, for it was the life rather than the literacies goals that were the learners' prime motivational drivers. In the ALN classes they worked on their literacies skills (relevantly

contextualised), and in the rest of their lives they practiced them in contexts that were meaningful. And what this exemplifies is the need to work in close partnership with other agencies that are also involved in the lives of learners. Such partnerships would enable professionals from different sectors to work together and create a holistic array of provision that would include ALN and that would have the capacity to offer learning opportunities and other life skills that would enable people to make the desired changes in their lives.

A final aspect of pedagogy and practice that we suggest is important in promoting positive change is that learners are not seen as passive recipients of teacher knowledge but rather as co-producers of meaning. This means that the learner is seen as a complex figure whose learning biography is fluid and subject to change. For example in the 'football group' it was observed that:

"The pedagogy is based on the Freirian principle of students 'saying their word' and using the generative themes of the sport for developing critical awareness and motivating students to read and write. (Obs, CS 3)."

And a student from this group said:

"I've managed to get along with a lot of people who support different football teams from me and I didn't think I'd be able to do this (learner, CS 3)."

So it is important that people have a positive educational experience and feel that their issues, circumstances and concerns are both acknowledged and valued, because in valuing these, they are also valued as people. For example:

"At the classes, you feel at ease, you feel good. Most people's problems are worse than mine... No one throws stones at anyone else, - we're all in the same boat but for different reasons. (learner, CS 4)."

Conclusion

Most of the learners in this study were experiencing some form of difficult life circumstances and were attempting to work through them. They saw their literacies learning as a resource that would help them to negotiate these transitions and achieve the life changes that they aspired to. They were at a turning point in their lives where the end point of their journey was bound up in being accepted as a 'normal' member of society.

All transitions, however, are accompanied by some level of struggle, uncertainty, identity conflict and denting of self confidence, however transient this might be. Furthermore, the outcomes of transitions cannot be predicted with absolute accuracy; they may lead to the desired endpoint or they may not. Some of these learners will attain their life and learning goals, and some will probably not. For many, the unsettled, often chaotic nature of their lives will militate against them attaining their dreams, but for all, the nature of the support that they receive through this change process will undoubtedly affect its outcomes. They were taking brave, uncertain and sometimes daunting steps in an attempt to succeed in changing aspects of their lives for the better. Those who were most vulnerable to non-completion tended to be those whose lives

were most turbulent and chaotic, so the transitions that they were working through were the most dramatic and therefore the support that they needed in negotiating them was greater than those with more settled lives.

For the most confident and able of adults, major change is often associated with a level of apprehension and uncertainty, but for many of the adults in this study who spoke of their low levels of confidence and self-esteem, these apprehensions are magnified considerably. It is essential therefore that the learning environment does nothing to knock their already fragile confidence and does everything to build their self-esteem.

This paper has pointed to some of the pedagogical practices that contributed to the formation of a positive learning environment thus enabling learners to begin to achieve their life and learning goals. However, the testimonies of participants in this study indicate that sound pedagogical practices on their own are not enough to enable vulnerable adults to forge the lives and identities that they aspire to with a passion. They spoke of the importance of supportive relationships between tutors and learners and amongst their co-learners, and of the difference that 'wrap around' support made in helping them to negotiate change. This holistic model created strong communities of practice where the affinities between members, be they tutors or learners, helped them to continue to attend through difficult times when they might otherwise have lapsed, and in continuing to attend, they continued to attain. It is our contention that this model of working provides the best and most effective context for literacies learning for vulnerable adults. We recognise that it has implications for the way that literacies learning is embedded in the work of partner organisations and the attendant complexities of managing such integrated provision. We also recognise the significant cost implications associated with it. However, we are also mindful of the vast number of vulnerable literacies learners who are struggling to change their lives for the better, and we ask therefore, - what is the cost to them and to society of not providing the optimum conditions to enable them to do so?

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27. LIFE TRAJECTORIES AND COGNITIVE PRECURSORS OF ADULT LITERACY¹

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Illiteracy is a widespread reality in today's world. In spite of the efforts made to fight this problem during the 20th century, the approximate number of adults who, in 2002, were 'unable to read and write -understanding it- a brief account of events related to their everyday life'² reached 877 million around the world (Muller & Murtagh, 2002). In Chile, there are no precise estimates about the number of people in this situation. On the one hand, people who declare themselves unable to read and write make up 4.6% of the population. On the other hand, the results of the IALS (*Internacional Adult Literacy Survey*) test show that 50% of the population over 15 is below level 1, which reveals a very low level of written comprehension (Bravo, Contreras, & Larrañaga, 2002). If the results of studies carried out in countries with a comparable level of school coverage are applied to the Chilean situation (cf. Borkowski, 1989; Hamilton & Stasinopoulos, 1987; Hautecoeur, 1988), this issue could be conservatively estimated to affect at least 10% of the population over 18 years of age.

Beyond the exact number, this situation is evidently a form of marginalisation for those who experience it: their access to art, communication, and formal education is severely limited due to the lack of a crucial tool to participate in these social activities. Linked to this 'cultural' marginalisation, there is another serious phenomenon of social and economical marginalisation: people who lack minimum reading and writing skills are utterly unable to access training and are thus condemned to only obtain badly paid jobs that provide little social status (Stercq, 1994; Descy, 2002; Bravo, Contreras, & Larrañaga, 2002). These jobs mostly belong to the informal economy, which means they are also excluded from retirement plans and all forms of social security. From a psychological point of view, it can be said that these adults have not had access to a series of fundamental cultural tools for the full evolution of the cognitive capacities of a wholly developed human being (Scribner & Cole, 1999). A more insidious form of marginalisation experienced by this population concerns the serious limitations that illiteracy causes for adequately assisting their children's schoolwork. Illiteracy, then, can be regarded as a serious risk factor for the transgenerational perpetuation of social exclusion.

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² Definition of illiteracy proposed by UNESCO (1958).

For all these reasons, the existence of a part of adult population which lacks an adequate mastery of reading and writing skills is a major handicap for the sustainable development of any society nowadays. In a context in which permanent education is growingly regarded as a necessity and a right, illiteracy is a social injustice analogous to the unhealthy distribution of income: both phenomena can only widen the gap between the richest and the poorest in our country (Bravo, Contreras, & Larrañaga, 2002; Larraín, 2002).

In order to face this issue, several adult literacy programmes have been created, mostly after the 1960s, both in Chile and around the world. Nevertheless, we know very little about the cognitive processes that determine the learning of the adults who participate in such literacy programmes. Even though the study of the psychology of children's literacy has developed dramatically over the last 30 years, these conceptual findings have seldom been used in adult literacy research (cf. Ferreiro, Vernon, Loperena, Taboada, Corona, Hope & Vaca, 1992; Greenberg, Ehri, & Perin, 1997; 2002; Sebastián, 2005).

As a result, the learning of reading and writing skills in children has been thoroughly studied from cognitive and psycholinguistic points of view in the last three decades. These approaches regard success in learning to read and write as depending on the child's previous acquisition of a series of cognitive processes that function as precursors of skills linked to written language. These cognitive processes are believed to appear together with the development of oral language, and then transform into metacognitive processes as they are activated by the teaching of the written language. They are thought to develop from oral language, differentiating themselves and becoming more complex until generating an adequate reading comprehension (cf. De Vega and Cuetos, 1999; Bravo, 2003; Villalón, 2008).

Following this approach, in the last few years the concept of *emergent literacy* has been defined. The concept applies both to learning to read and to the development of previous psycholinguistic processes, which are prerequisites for acquiring this knowledge (Whitehurst and Lonigan, 1998 in Bravo, 2003). According to these authors, there is no clear distinction between reading and pre-reading processes; instead, reading emerges due to the interaction of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that children develop before dealing with texts. Thus, the ability to read is not acquired at a precise moment, and is instead believed to be an *emergent* process which progresses to the degree permitted by the development and interaction of such processes.

Based on a synthesis of the literature on emergent literacy, Bravo (2003) describes the existence of three specific cognitive processes that make the transformation of written language into oral language possible, or, in other words, three processes that enable the construction of personal meaning based on the graphic signs of written language. These processes are: (1) peripheral processes for the recognition of graphic signs; (2) intermediate processes that carry out the transformation of visual perception into verbal meaning and grant access to the lexicon; (3) the central processes of abstraction and categorisation of meanings into semantic networks (Bravo, 1999, in Bravo, 2003).

- 1) Processes for the recognition of graphic signs, or visual-orthographic strategies, belong to the recognition of pronounceable graphic signs

within an orthographic context (Bravo, 2003). This recognition involves the memorization of such signs, which is accomplished phonologically (Ehri, 1998, in Bravo, 2003). In children who learn to read through a normal process, the development of visual orthographic recognition is based on phonological proficiency, which enables them to relate phonemic and orthographic aspects. For Bravo (op. cit.), the cognitive processes involved in the visual-orthographic strategy are visual discrimination between words, attention, and verbal memory. The speed of recognition is also important.

- 2) The processes for the transformation of visual perception into verbal meaning and access to the lexicon, or phonological strategies, are aimed at decoding written words by transforming letters into basic sounds associated to the individual's oral language (Bravo, 2003). In normal reading acquisition, these processes lead to the development of segmental awareness, made up by de-centering (distinguishing the relevant properties of an auditory stimulus) and by analytic thought, which facilitates the abstraction and categorisation of phonemes (ibid.).

It must be pointed out that segmentation processes are followed by the visual-orthographic recognition processes of whole words: the recognition of written words is automatic, and does not require the phonological segmentation process to be active at all times during reading.

- 3) Finally, the processes of abstraction and categorisation of meanings, or semantic strategies, are involved in the association of the phonographic sequence with its meaning. In order to perform the written word-meaning association it is not enough to know the vocabulary. Rather, it becomes fundamental to be able to connect the written text with networks of personal meaning. In this respect, the processes of verbal abstraction and categorisation are essential.

Psycholinguistic approaches based on the theory of information processing, which have traditionally been employed to study the development of these cognitive processes in children, suggest that it depends mostly on the general level of cognitive development of children, and, to a lesser extent, on the early stimulation received and on pre-school education (cf. Bravo, 2003; Villalón, 2008). Concepts such as 'school readiness' [*madurez escolar* in Spanish] (Condemarán, Chadwick & Milicic, 1978/2003) illustrate this approach, which stresses the importance of the child's neurophysiological maturing for the preparation of the psychic functions upon which reading is based. Given this general level of cognitive development, associated to a level of neurophysiological maturity for each specific child, the processes of recognition of letters and words, phonological awareness, and verbal reasoning should tend to be at a similar development level (op. cit.).

Even though some attempts have been made to evaluate the applicability of various aspects of this approach to adults' acquisition of reading and writing skills, the theoretical and empirical void still persists. One of the few studies dealing with this issue was conducted by Greenberg et al. (2002) who, when comparing a group of adults learning to read and a group of children in similar school levels, established that adults tended to favor the use of visual-orthographic

strategies, whereas children preferred phonological strategies, which, according to the authors, supports the idea that adults' difficulties for reading and spelling are mostly related to low grapho-phonemic and decoding skills.

From a historic-cultural approach to the study of literacy (cf. Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000), the problem of the origin and interaction of the processes involved in reading throughout human development is tackled by considering those processes as *precursors* of reading. Just like in information processing models, it is stated that phonological, visual-orthographic, and semantic strategies are the basis of reading and they develop before reading itself. Nevertheless, according to Verhoeven, Elbro, & Reitsma (2002), research has shown that social interaction activities play a decisive role in the development of oral and written language in childhood. With respect to this issue, it may be hypothesized that such cognitive strategies are psychic functions which become internalised (in the sense used by Vygotsky, 1931/1995) based on social practices in cultural contexts characterized by the use of written language. Thus, by using the term *precursor*, there is an allusion to the idea that these strategies may begin to develop early in people's lives, but that the combination of psychic functions that makes reading possible occurs later and in the context of social practices that require and promote the mastery of reading.

On the other hand, information processing approaches to reading tend to favour the view that reading skills, once acquired, can be applied in all contexts that require reading. From a sociocultural approach to the development of reading, it is relevant to ask the question of how a set of inter-related sociocultural practices become integrated to achieve the development of specific ways that account for written language (Gee, 2002). When advancing this notion, Gee points out that the learning of [reading] skills is 'a different thing with different effects [...] which functions differently in different Discourses [sic] and specific social practices' (op. cit., p. 37). Considering this idea, it becomes questionable to pose that the development of pre-reading skills has a decontextualised origin, or that they lead to the ability to read efficiently in all places and for any task. From a sociocultural perspective, it should be highlighted that the cognitive processes which act as the precursors of reading originate, develop, and interact in operations that take place in different contexts of social practices. Similarly, Judith Kalman proposes that 'access to written language [...] is constructed through participation in different contexts, in which interaction with others makes it possible to appropriate reading and writing' (Kalman, 2003, p. 60).

From this point of view, then, the similarities between the development levels observed in the cognitive precursors of reading for each child might be explained not so much by their dependence on the subject's neurophysiological maturity, but, rather, by the heterogeneity of the social practices in which we, human beings, participate during our childhood, in the period before the development of reading and writing. Certain contexts of practices, enriched by the use of given cultural artifacts (cf. Cole, 1999), are thought to promote the development of all the precursors of reading and writing, whereas more deprived ones tend to limit this development. In contrast, human beings who learn to read in

adulthood are believed to participate in a series of diverse cultural practices during their much longer pre-reading development period, which might promote the development of certain specific cognitive precursors, without affecting the development of others. The life trajectory of each individual subject -and the social practices that have formed it- are thought to result in the development of certain cognitive precursors of reading and writing.

Some studies have linked life processes and the learning of reading in adulthood. For instance, Ferreiro et al. (1992), from a Piagetian perspective, stress the relevance of the conceptualisation that illiterate adults have of the writing system and how learning to read and write must be tackled based on their effective knowledge, achieved through the social activities which they have taken part in. On the other hand, in a qualitative study, Judith Kalman (2003) concludes that the acquisition of written language necessitates access to the use of reading and writing, which manifests itself differently in different reader-writer interactions. In this regard, her study highlights the relevance of how the domain of reading starts to grow through the life trajectory of the participants depending on their involvement in social contexts through their lives. Another study (Sebastián, & de Villers, 2006) describes, concerning the problem of the meaning of education and its relationship with identity dynamics in educational processes, how the life trajectories of different adult individuals affect the meaning of learning to read and write in a training context. However, none of the studies available deal with the development process of reading from the perspective of the development of its cognitive precursors, and how they connect with the events and processes of a life trajectory.

Among the social practices that may differentially influence the development of the cognitive precursors of reading and writing in adulthood, the literature emphasises schooling trajectory (Cole, 1999; 2005; Cole & Scribner, 1999; Morrison & McDonald, 2002; Saxe, 1999); family life (Letelier, 1996; Wasik, Dobbins, & Herrmann, 2002); and work life (Peredo, 2003).

The present study tackles the issue of the cognitive precursors of reading and writing acquisition in a population of illiterate adults taking regular literacy courses. Specifically, we asked, do the same cognitive processes described for children operate in adults, namely, precursors of literacy acquisition? Are there different specific patterns in the configuration of the cognitive precursors of literacy acquisition in adults, which could be associated with certain life trajectory types of adult students and/or certain milestones in such trajectories?

Methodology

A sample of 101 illiterate adults (71.3% female and 28.7% male, aged between 19 and 82) taking regular literacy courses in Chile's Metropolitan Region were evaluated with a set of three tests that respectively measure: initial phonological awareness, recognition of letters and words, and verbal reasoning skills. The existence of groups that differed regarding the development pattern of the three precursors evaluated was analyzed through cluster analysis.

Results

The cluster analysis made it possible to evaluate eight solutions in which 2 to 9 statistically different groups were established. The three most relevant solutions concerning their power to explain the phenomenon at hand are presented below. All the values indicate the subjects' percentage of achievement in each of the cognitive precursors evaluated: initial phonological awareness (PA), recognition of letters and simple words (RW), and verbal reasoning skills (VR), specifically, abstraction and categorisation.

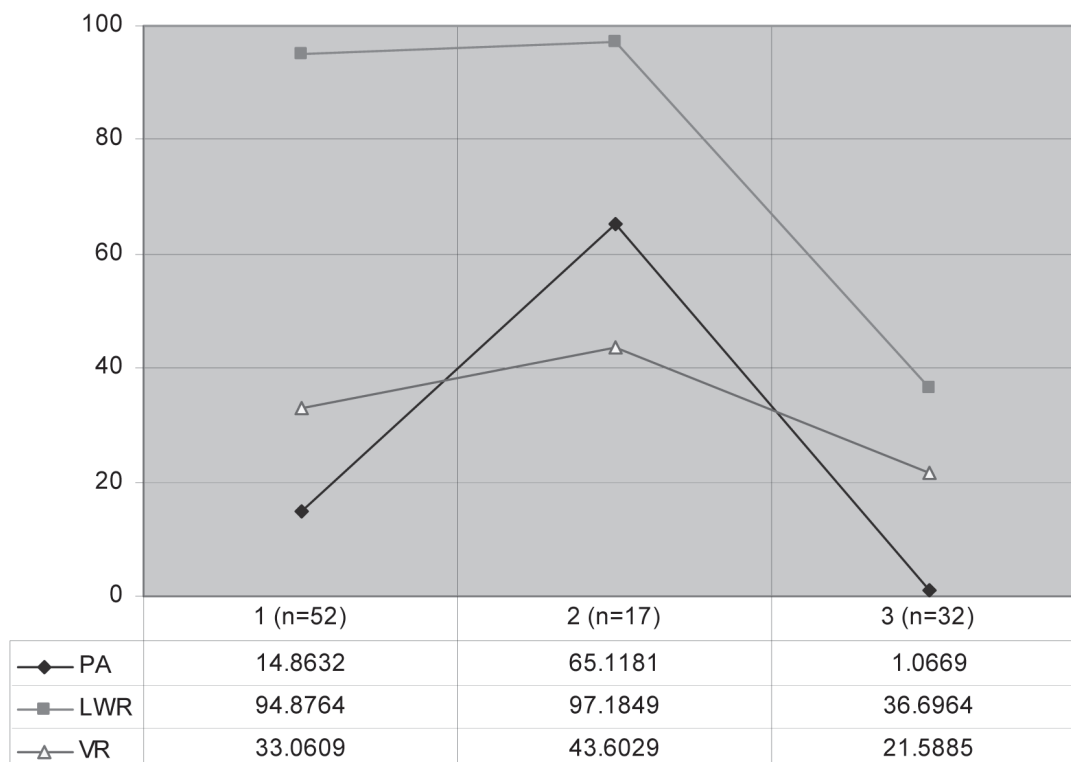


Table 1. Three-cluster solution

As can be observed in Table 1, at the first level it is possible to distinguish three groups of adult learners whose configuration patterns of cognitive precursors of literacy show significant differences. Group 3 (n=32) has an extremely low performance in phonological awareness (PA=1.1%) and a low performance both in word recognition (RW=36.7%) and verbal reasoning (VR=21.6%), with the first variable displaying a markedly better result. Group 2 performs well in phonological awareness (PA=65.1%), very well in word recognition (RW=97.2%), and averagely in comprehension (VR=43.1%). Group 1 (n=52) is characterized by having a very low result in phonological awareness (PA=14.9%), a very high result in word recognition (RW=94.9%), and a low result in comprehension (VR=33.1%).

A simple comparison of groups 2 and 3 may lead us to conclude that the prediction made by the information processing approaches tends to be confirmed with this sample, since *roughly*, one group (number 2) displayed high development of all the precursors of literacy and another group (number 3) showed low development of these precursors. Nevertheless, the existence of

group 1 contradicts this prediction, as it is made up by a set of adult learners with a varied development of precursors. This tendency is even clearer when reviewing the six-cluster solution, shown in Table 2.

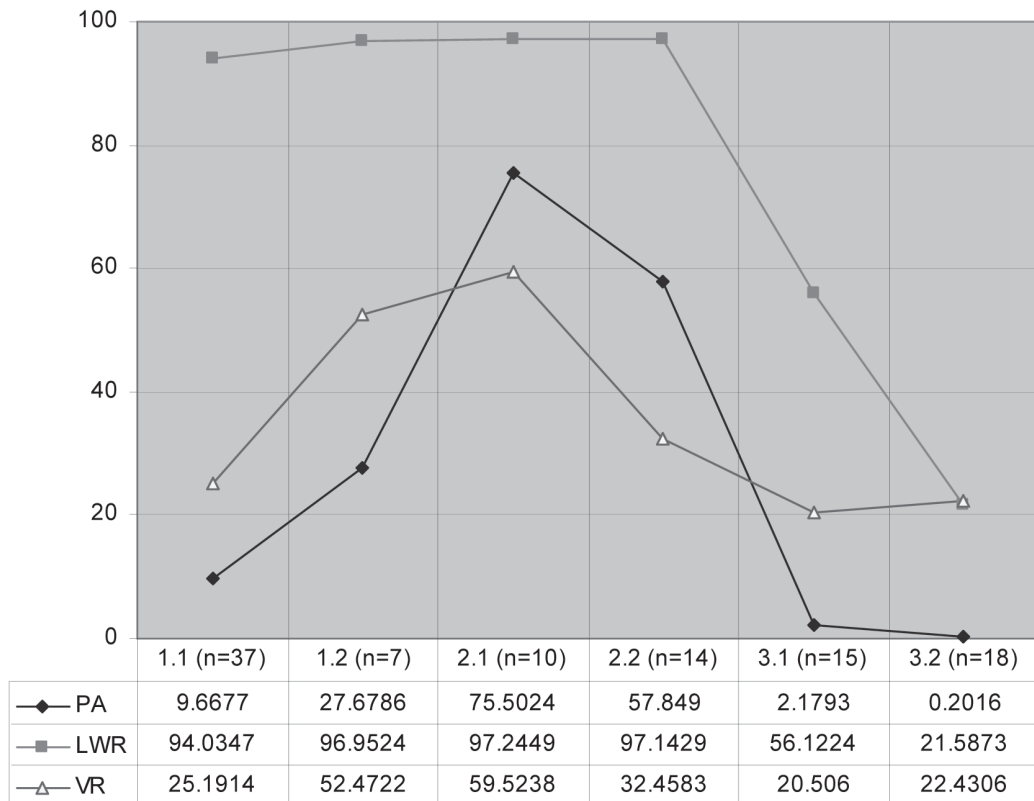


Table 2. Six-cluster solution

The bipartition of the groups in the initial (three-cluster) solution, shows that each of the initial groups has relevant differences in the relationship between the performance levels achieved by the adult learners in each test. Thus, between patterns 1.1 and 1.2, and between patterns 2.1 and 2.2, it is possible to observe substantial performance differences in verbal reasoning and phonological awareness. However, it is relevant to point out that the performance in the word recognition variable stays homogeneous in these groups. In contrast, patterns 3.1 and 3.2 show a different behavior: the levels of comprehension and phonological awareness are constantly low in both groups, whereas there is an important difference in the word recognition performance of both groups, with group 3.1 displaying a clearly superior performance (average) compared to group 3.2 (low).

Concerning our research question, patterns 1.2, 2.2, and 3.1 are especially noteworthy, since they indicate groups of adult learners whose development level of the three literacy precursors evaluated is saliently varied. Groups 1.2 and 2.2 reveal high levels of word recognition, along with an average level in one of the other two precursors (verbal reasoning in the case of group 1.2 and phonological awareness for group 2.2), and a low level in the remaining precursor (phonological awareness for group 1.2 and verbal reasoning for group 2.2). Group 3.1 displays a similar pattern, but with lower performance levels (average in word recognition, low in verbal reasoning, and very low in phonological awareness).

The same tendency towards the proliferation of mixed performance groups in the three precursors studied can be observed in the nine-cluster solution, shown in Table 3.

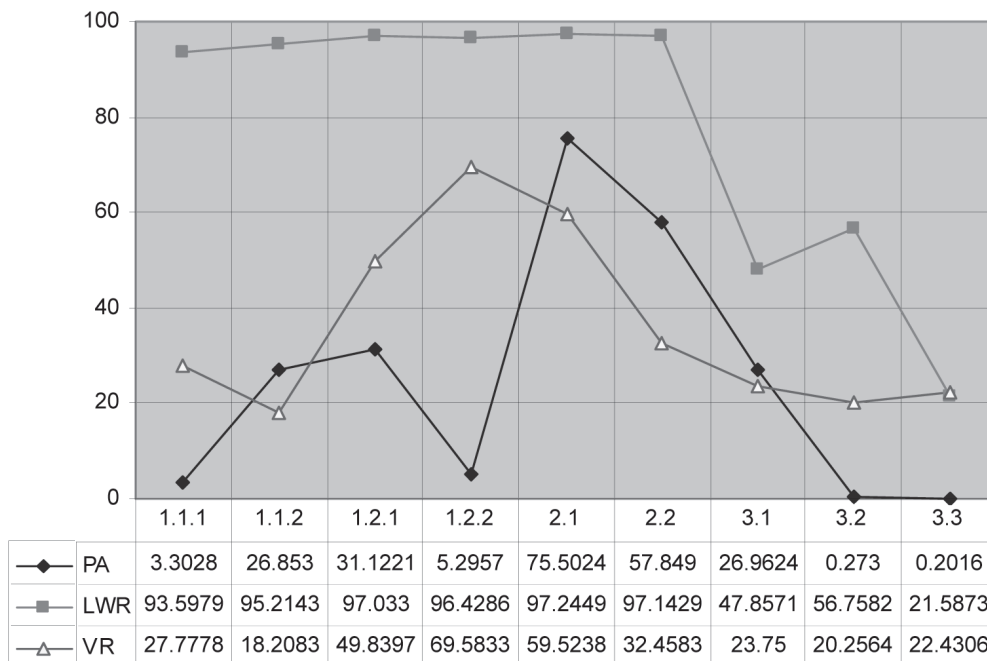


Table 3. Nine-cluster solution

Nevertheless, the results of this solution are only presented to indicate a tendency, since the groups established in this solution vary radically with respect to the number of subjects they contain, with extreme cases such as pattern 1.2.2 in a group with only 2 subjects.

Discussion

These results make it possible to state that there is variability with regard to the precursors of literacy in the case of illiterate adults taking regular literacy courses. The visual-orthographic, phonological, and semantic strategies believed to develop at different levels in children’s pre-reading period can also be found, with different development levels, in adults who begin an explicit teaching-learning experience.

These results, on the other hand, support a historical-cultural approach to the development of the psychological functions that take part in the development of the ability to read written texts. In contrast with the predictions of an approach that emphasises the role of psycho-physiological maturing, the adults studied are not all at a high level of development of the three cognitive precursors studied, nor do they display homogeneous development levels in such precursors. On the contrary, it is possible to observe a set of configuration patterns in the development of these precursors.

At a hypothetical level, it may be possible to associate the development of said patterns to different life trajectories of adults, in which the participation in certain areas of social practices has been privileged over others. For instance, it could be hypothesised that the profiles with a low or very low development of phonological awareness are associated to subjects with a low level of schooling,

or with a poor or even traumatic school experience. On the other hand, high performance levels in word recognition may be associated to a longer or better quality schooling period, in the cases which also display a high development of phonological awareness. However, they could also be associated with the development of strategies to recognise simple words in work or home environments, especially in the case of subjects who also show low levels of phonological awareness development. Regarding the high development levels of verbal reasoning skills, there may be an association with high phonological awareness and word recognition levels in only one of the patterns obtained, with the relationships being variable in the others. The development of this precursor may be associated to participation in activities that demand the ability to solve problems through speech, such as certain work contexts, or, particularly, certain forms of participation in community or general development organisations.

These hypotheses are being tested in an ongoing study in which subjects similar to those presented in this report are measured with regard to the development of their cognitive precursors of literacy, and are interviewed about their life trajectories. It is expected to establish a relationship between participation in certain areas of activity during their lives and the configuration of precursors typical of these areas. Besides, it intends to establish the possible association between these configurations of precursors and the effective acquisition of reading and writing in literacy courses.

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