



Edge Hill University



BIRMINGHAM CITY
University

NORTHERN IRELAND IMPACT FORUM MEETING

15th June at 10.00

OCNNI Sirius House, 10 Heron Road, Belfast BT3 9LE

Joined up approaches that transform lives



LEARNING AND
WORK INSTITUTE

Forum for Adult Learning



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Scotland's Learning Partnership



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Background

The 2016 UNESCO *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* focussed on three overlapping domains in which adult learning impacted on people of all backgrounds and ages:

- ❖ Health and well-being
- ❖ Employment and work
- ❖ Civic, social and community life

These areas broadly reflect research undertaken as part of the UK work programme for the European Agenda for Adult Learning. Both sets of research data illustrate how adult learning impacts on a number of areas of our lives simultaneously. Further evidence congruent with these findings can be found in the UCU research project *Further Education: transforming lives and communities*¹ which draws

¹ UCU Further Education: Transforming Lives and communities <http://transforminglives.web.ucu.org.uk/>

on a series of in-depth interviews and a collection of reflective written responses from learners and professionals in further Education (FE) settings, to understand the transformative power of FE. This research study highlighted that:

Reclaiming identities

FE enabled learners to reclaim their spoilt educational identities, to reconstruct them, to reposition themselves within their personal relationships and to re-enter their families and communities as active and resourceful individuals with hope and renewed status.

Empowerment

Learners' accounts revealed FE courses to be pathways to overcoming cycles of despair connected to low-paid work and low self-esteem; problematic and painful domestic issues: for example, abusive relationships, alcohol dependency and mental health issues.

Mental health and well-being

For several of the participants, FE offered a lifeline that helped in their recovery from a mental health issue. Transformative education is drawn from and situated within individual and communal resources.

The project aims to understand and provide evidence of how the further education (FE) sector is vital in transforming lives and communities in 21st century Britain. The study provided students, teachers, parents and employers with the opportunity to tell their stories, linking the distinctness of FE to the impact it has on individuals, society and the economy, and strongly drawing out the role of teachers and the learning environment they establish in making a difference to quality teaching and learning.

Seminar aims:

This seminar aims to create a critical space to facilitate:

- ❖ The sharing of effective practice and discusses the challenges /issues professionals currently face;
- ❖ The exploration of the professional development challenges ahead and the action required to take the agenda forward in a productive and positive way;
- ❖ The strengthening of the agency of practitioners by providing a platform for their voices to make their practice – across diverse learning settings - more visible;
- ❖ The strengthening of the *adult learner voice* to make audible learners' opinions on how they view their education and what they want from their tutors.

Discussion points:

This seminar aims to facilitate a critical discussion about the role of professionals in navigating the current policy landscape in order to deliver high impact,

transformative learning experiences and to:

- ❖ Explore the extent to which the adult learning workforce is ready for these changes;
- ❖ Identify the potential for professionals to be involved in planning for change;
- ❖ Explore the challenges committed practitioners face as they strive to deliver high impact, transformative adult learning ;
- ❖ Identify knowledge and skills sets that practitioners need;
- ❖ Explore the current level of developmental support on offer to learners and whether it is meeting their needs;
- ❖ Identify strategies which will support and enable practitioners to develop / take charge of their professional development
- ❖ Scope out and propose changes to teacher training and CPD that prepares new and experienced teachers to promote:

Social integration and Social mobility are key drivers

Overview

Potential Impact of Education on well-being

Learners' histories and biographies can impact on their progress in different learning environments. As such teachers' awareness and sensitivity to the issues that learners bring into the classroom and the development of strategies for dealing with them effectively is important if these barriers are to be successfully negotiated. This may entail therapeutic interventions for those who are most vulnerable such as those with mental health issues and/or physical disabilities. But at a more fundamental level, in most cases it involves providing a learning environment in which affirmation is sensitively and strategically deployed. Education, including basic skills education, has been shown to enhance confidence, contribute to personal development, promote health, social and political participation and lead to

benefits in the public and private domains of learners' lives.

Bynner and Parsons (2005) drawing on the preliminary results from their longitudinal research using the 1958 and 1970 British Birth Cohort studies identified:

Substantial differences in life chances, quality of life and social inclusion were evident between individual adults at or below entry 2 compared with others at higher levels of literacy and numeracy competence. Entry 2 skills were associated with lack of qualifications, poor labour market experiences and prospects, poor material and financial circumstances, poor health prospects and little social and political participation.

(Bynner and Parsons 2005: 33)

Improvement in skills for men was linked to increased home ownership and better employment prospects. As well as reducing their level of income, unemployment also severs people's links to

important social networks, and may impact negatively on their sense of self-esteem (Field 2008). On the flipside, improved skills through engagement with education also resulted in a rise in community engagement and political interest. The women experienced similar socio-economic benefits with their skills improvement; these were most noticeable for literacy improvement. In relation to mental health and well-being the members of the cohort who had improved were also less likely to show symptoms of depression, report long-term health related problems, articulate feelings of disillusionment such as having no agency over their lives (Bynner and Parsons 2006).

Whilst a report carried out by De Coulon et al. (2010) investigated how human capital (measured by highest education levels and basic skills) is allied to three health behaviour outcomes which include: drinking, smoking and weight. The results demonstrated that education

significantly reduced the probability of being a smoker, of being a binge drinker and of being classified as obese. The report stated:

Basic skills and education significantly affect the probability of being a heavy/binge drinker and a smoker. In particular, educational attainment affects both alcohol consumption and smoking status; those with higher levels of qualifications are significantly less likely to engage in heavy alcohol use and are less likely to smoke compared to individuals possessing no qualifications.

(De Coulon et al 2010: 22)

Clearly, adult education courses for young and older adults offers a second chance of re-engaging with education; it can contribute to personal development, including developing soft skills such as confidence (a valued outcome in Barton *et al.*'s 2007 study) economic, social and health related benefits. Juxtaposed to this, adult

education courses offer them a better chance of acquiring the tools needed to run their own lives.

These findings are particularly interesting to commissioners of a range of services in cities and devolved administrations. With devolved budgets and outcomes-based local commissioning arrangements over the coming years we are likely to see changes to the way adult learning and education works. This, we would argue, requires joined up thinking across discipline areas different service 'silos'; a cohesive approach with a focus on challenging inequality and working towards models of social justice that empower communities is a necessity.

This would suggest that pedagogies of transformation driven by social empathy, care and solidarity are essential. Locally embedded educators are also in a position to invite students to take part in a larger community discourse that

attempts to solve problems and create alternatives to oppressive situations (Duckworth and Maxwell 2015). This requires a conceptualisation of the theoretical and methodological issues involved in understanding and representing the literacy and other curricula based on respect, where learners can flourish in the public and private domains of their life and reach their potential (Duckworth, 2013; Duckworth & Smith, 2017).

However, to what extent is the adult learning workforce ready for these changes? This is a crucial question if we are going to provide a meaningful strategy and approach that reaches out to and works within diverse communities. And how far will professionals be enlisted and involved in planning for change? What challenges do practitioners face in supporting and delivering high impact, transformative adult learning? What knowledge and skills sets do they need? Is the professional developmental support currently on offer

sufficient to meet their needs? How will colleagues be supported and enabled to develop / take charge of their professional development? What changes need to be made to enhance the current professional development offer for practitioners?

Teachers share their values in practice

Alan is a bricklayer and builder with decades of industry experience. He sees his work in college as providing more than just skills and knowledge about the construction industry.



You get to know your students. The conversation changes from year one to three as they become more comfortable with you. If you are seen as

approachable and open. The conversation is different and the learning changes. They're stand-offish but three months down the line, they are more relaxed in the workshop. They become comfortable with calling you over. If they need showing two or three times, which some do, they're more comfortable. And that's a fantastic thing because it makes teaching and learning better.

Claire is a Psychology teacher in a further education college. Claire sees transformative learning as an integral aspect of her pedagogical approach.



As a result of my own experiences in adult education, both as being a student and then later returning to adult education as a tutor, I became interested in the powerful and

emancipatory nature of adult education and particularly the process of transformative learning and how this occurs. I find that students in adult education often comment on how studying has 'changed their lives' and 'opened their minds'. This 'change' described by students is a drive in my transformative approaches to teaching.

Kate a dance and literacy teacher shares her approaches to teaching



My learning journey has been a turbulent one, from leaving school at 16 with little academic qualifications and feeling lost, to finding further education later on in life and discovering a new love of learning. I believe

my own experiences have influenced my approach to teaching and have helped me to be able to identify with the students that I work with. I strive to make learning a two way process, recognising and valuing the students for who they are and learning from them as much as they learn from me. Further Education changed my life for the better, it gave me opportunities which led me to achieve things I had never thought possible. Now I hope to give back and support students in finding their own voices.

Kate described how many of the students whom she teaches have come from chaotic backgrounds, have encountered significant barriers to learning and have had a negative experience of education prior to coming to college. This has affected the way they view education and has resulted in them experiencing anger, frustration and withdrawal which has had a negative impact on their learning.

Education and violence: Exclusion and re-engagement

16-year-old Adam found it hard to control his anger in school and felt he was making no progress. He likes the calm environment in college; here, he is gaining qualifications, becoming more confident and has a clearer view of what he wants to do in future. Now, he has hope and self-belief.



I like teachers who will speak to you properly. Then you listen a lot more... If they speak to you properly and in a good manner, you listen more.

Role models like Adam, who are not outside of other young adult students' world picture, have the potential to break down barriers, inspire and give hope. Sharing Adam's story played a key part in making Kate's

students' learning experience more personal and transformational.

Adult education and Mental Health

Duckworth (2013) identified how adult education was powerful in facilitating learners to challenge symbolic and physical violence which they described as catalysing mental health episodes. Tracy's mental health issues had included bouts of depression and this was having an impact on her role as mother. As highlighted by WHO (2000):

Women are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, psychosomatic systems, eating problems and sexual dysfunction. Violence may also affect their reproductive health. (ibid: 3)

Indeed, as Duckworth (2013) documents, deprivation and poverty are strongly linked to the prevalence of mental ill-health in communities. For

Tracy, her mental health was having a huge effect on the stability of the household. With a family to care for and without a partner to offer any support she found it 'worse than ever to cope'.

Tracy needed huge resources of emotional energy during her childhood to survive in the bullying environment she grew up in and this then was replicated with motherhood: each impacted on the other. On medication for her depression, she often felt lethargic and tired and angry about being labelled as mentally ill and an unfit mother.

Tracy was afraid to contact Social Services no matter how much help she felt she needed support:

Resp: *No way will I contact the social again, they're useless. They gave me no help. I'm still in shit street, but worse off with them knowing it.*

Int: *Why*

Resp: *They're looking for one mistake, one move that they*

don't like and they'll take me kids from me. I won't let 'em though. They think they've got me sussed, have they bloody 'ell, I've got them sussed. A load of interferers, looking to point the finger where it suits.

Tracy described how she was very nervous about starting a course and how, *'It was a huge step to come through the front doors and back into the classroom, a place I hadn't been since I left school.'* Joining a night-class in literacy made her realise that she wasn't on her own. There were other like-minded people keen to top up their skills and this gave her the hope, enthusiasm and commitment for her future. Below is an extract, from an initial interview, based on how the literacy course impacted upon Tracy's view of 'self'. In this passage, Tracy describes how her learning has changed her:

Resp: *I'm more confident I'd say, yeh, more positive. If I can do this, I know I can do whatever I*

want really, if I set my mind to it. But it is, it's just like freeing the wheels innit and turning them on?

Int: *Yeh*

Resp: *I'm a lot more confident now, definite.*

Tracy, further explained how she really wanted her daughter to 'Make summat of herself' and 'Get a career rather than just working in factories, grateful for cleaning jobs or owt to earn enough to do no more than get by.'

Further education is shown to be beneficial in the positive effect it can have on mental health and well-being. For several of the participants in the UCU *Transforming lives and communities* project, further education offered a lifeline that helped in their recovery from a mental health issue. Transformative education is drawn from and situated within individual and communal resources. The positive impact of the transformation extended to their family circumstances.

Nyomi's partner had a long term illness and when she had a child she became depressed and felt locked in a spiral of despair.

Encouraged by her health visitor, she attended a course at college. She felt accepted for who she was and a year later has begun studying a Podiatry degree. Now her partner is also beginning to study. Together they want to improve their lives and provide for their daughter



Violence and intergenerational illiteracy

Adult Education offers a safe and critical space which facilitates learners to give voice to the histories of violence and trauma.

Teachers can create a classroom based on respect and recognition of the learner as a whole person, whereby learners can begin to heal. In this model, importantly, education often connects closely to potential career trajectory – often through the same staff and within the same educational space. This connectedness provides a perfect environment for a process of renewal and regeneration that enables hope to function as a real latent force.

Joanne arrived at college after splitting with her violent partner. She struggled to read and write and had low confidence. She described how attending college had given her the strength not to go back to his abuse:

If it wasn't for the good friends I made at college I would have probably gone back to him, had more kids hanging off me and been in a lousy relationship

Like Nyomi and Tracy in her resistance against patriarchy,

the social network of friendship and care was important.



From struggling to read and write, she grasped at adult education as a life line that provided a pathway for her to gain a career in nursing and to challenge the intergenerational poverty of her background. She describes how:

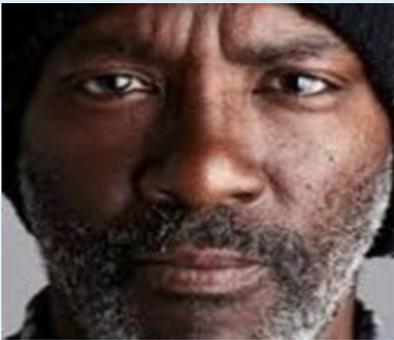
Through learning to read and write etc, I now see life differently. Now when my children bring homework home I'm right onto it. I sit down with them and we go through their work together. For example, my son Andrew is only eight and he has 20 spellings a week to learn. This week he had words such as

exhibition, examination and electrocution. Before returning to education I would never have been able to help him with words like this, so the chances are he would not have learnt them. He would have gone to school, had his spelling test. Maybe he got 4 or 5 out of 20, if he was lucky, felt a bit daft in front of the children who had got most them right and slowly but surely before you know it, it's a knock on effect, history is repeating itself. But because I can now sit down with Andrew and help him with his homework he gets marks like 17 out of 20, which to me is pretty amazing. I really feel that in my case because I'm all my children have, if I'd not have returned to education the chances are that my children would have ended up experiencing difficulties in their education. I'm not saying that they won't but if they do, like I did, I can now help them.

Transformative learning and social capital

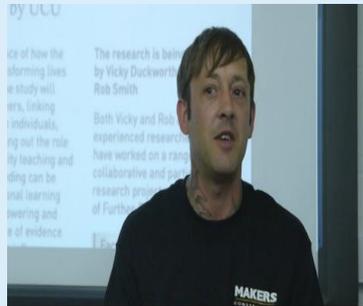
Social capital is not a homogenous resource equally available and accessible to all members of communities. For the learners in this group, who had been constrained by class, gender and ethnicity both they and their communities benefitted from adult education.

Herbert is a photographer who has had his work exhibited all over the country. Leaving school at 16, he trained as bricklayer before returning as an adult to college where his dyslexia was identified for the first time.



When you go to college you think, 'What I'm learning here is for me! It's my livelihood, it's my future.' You wake up then and you study. FE gives you the freedom to be yourself.

Dean arrived at college with few formal qualifications but with years of experience of labouring on building sites. He was new to technology, found it daunting to use a computer and used a pen and paper for written tasks; but he could put his hand to many jobs in the building trade.



The teachers were always there, always there. Anything I was unsure about they would stay behind and help. And they would always push me. They don't talk down to you. There's good friendship there. You're not afraid to ask. And if you don't understand, they'll sit you down and explain it.

Adult Education and Integration

Chaima grew up in Oldham. She describes her experience of schooling and how it ended in disillusion and low level qualifications.



Entering further education, Chaima rediscovered her learning identity and, with the support of teachers who believed in her, worked steadily until she gained entry to Higher Education. FE was a site where she met people from other walks of life and learnt about other cultures; she formed friends that enriched her life. She fed her empowerment back into the community and promoted social integration.

The teachers

Jimmy works with 14-16 year olds in college – some of whom have been excluded from school and feel school is not for them. He brings a lot of life experience to his teaching job from different areas of employment including sales and business. He doesn't give up on his students. He refuses to write them off.



We're able to offer differentiation. There's stretch and challenge. We're a lot more flexible with the programme. We do a lot of work both pastoral and progression-wise.

Teacher education, joined up thinking and transformative curricula

The necessity for resistance and counter hegemonic practice remains a challenge for teachers. Teachers need to

be aware of how their beliefs and practices may be shaped by perceptions of learners' ability tied to class, gender and ethnicity and to challenge the reproductive tendencies these perceptions involve.

Offering a space both in the classroom and the community for the learners to share their narratives allows for the sharing of obstacles and solutions to overcome them.

Teachers need ensure that their practice is inclusive and respectful, to ensure learners have equality of opportunity and that they feel safe to learn.

There needs to be a national commitment in promoting diversity and combating social injustice thorough education; educational programmes clearly need to address issues related to widening

participation to attract a workforce which reflects the communities served (Duckworth *et al.* 2016).

Being a transformative teacher and providing transformative learning experiences for learners is not something that anyone does in isolation. Transformative teaching is about connecting the classroom to society outside the classroom walls. It is about seeing learners as people with histories and, most importantly with hopes for the future, hopes that can be nurtured and, with the right support, realised and made concrete. This demands a holistic and integrated approach to learners but also to the way education can reconnect with their lifeworlds. . As such it facilitates learners to challenge the conditions of oppression, changing the way they interpret their own experience (Ade-Ojo and Duckworth 2016) which can lead to transformation across

the public and private domains learners inhabit.

Vitality, it is about education being viewed, not in isolation but being bound, in empowering, creative and innovative ways to:

- ❖ Health and well-being
- ❖ Employment and work
- ❖ Civic, social and community life

This demands a different way of training teachers for the 21st century classroom, it requires a different value position to the dominant curriculum. It requires the kind of connectedness we have described above as an integral feature of all curricula in further education settings.

This could yield a different approach to practice which derives its values from a libertarian, equality and justice base (as against an instrumentalist base).

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