

Transformative Teaching and Learning in Further Education

**Summative report for the University and College Union
Transforming Lives and Communities project**

Professor Vicky Duckworth & Dr Rob Smith

TRANSFORMING LIVES

further education: learning hope



Dr Vicky Duckworth is Professor of Education at Edge Hill University. Vicky has developed considerable expertise as an educationalist and researcher in the field of Adult Literacy and Education. She is deeply committed to challenging inequality through critical and emancipatory approaches to education, widening participation, inclusion, community action and engaging in research with a strong social justice agenda. Presently, she is leading UCU funded research project (with Dr Rob Smith) which aims to understand and provide evidence of how the further education (FE) sector is vital in transforming lives and communities in 21st century Britain.

transforminglives.web.ucu.org.uk/about-this-project

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Foreword

Angela Rayner, Shadow Secretary of State for Education

Education is one of the most valuable investments that any government can make. It has the power to transform and enrich our lives in so many ways, with benefits for individuals, employers and our society as a whole.

But in recent years Tory austerity has led to our education system being chronically under-valued and under-funded. Nowhere has this been truer than in further education, which has seen successive cuts in every year since 2010.

Yet I know from my own experience that further education has a vital role to play in helping people get on in life. I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for my local college giving me a second chance at education; helping me to build my skills and gain the confidence I needed to succeed.

I welcome this report because it reminds us that education is about more than numbers – it's about the people like me whose lives are transformed by learning.

The stories in this report show how further education embodies Labour's values of fairness and social justice, and why we need to invest more in it. It's stories like these that have inspired Labour's vision for a National Education Service – an institution in the mould of the National Health Service which will ensure that education is free at the point of delivery, funded by progressive taxation, and serving everyone from cradle to grave.

The report also reminds us that our further education system is built on the incredible contributions of education staff. They work tirelessly to support people from all backgrounds to reach their full potential, and we need to do much more to recognise the value of their work.

Labour's National Education Service isn't just about educating - it's about empowering. Through access to transformative learning, we want to give people from all walks of life the power to take control over their own future and thrive. This report helps to demonstrate why that expansive vision of education is so important in building a fairer future for the many, not the few.



Angela Rayner
Shadow Secretary of State
for Education

Introduction

The UCU Further Education in England: Transforming lives & Communities Research Project

Commissioned by UCU, the *Further Education in England: Transforming lives & Communities* research project aims to understand and provide robust evidence of how further education is vital in transforming lives and communities in 21st century Britain. It also provides evidence of how and why further education is an important lever for supporting social justice, sustainability and social cohesion; it presents a picture of colleges challenging intergenerational poverty and of offering people from diverse communities hope, agency and a positive orientation towards the future.

The first phase of the project (2016-17) led to the generation of a number of outputs which included, the production of an interim report, an interactive digital platform and a National practitioner handbook (Duckworth and Smith 2017A & 2017B). We gathered data from more than 150 participants across more than thirty five institutions: learners, teachers, managers, employers, community members, parents and other family members shared their stories. This enabled us to build up a robust qualitative evidence base to illustrate the nature of transformative teaching and learning, the power of further education to reach into diverse communities and its expanding 'ripple effect': the powerful individual, social, economic, and health benefits it produces (e.g. see Duckworth and Smith 2016, 19).

The first stage of the research sought to collate qualitative evidence of the distinctness of further education and its impact on individuals, society and the economy. In addition, we gathered evidence related to why teachers enter further education, how teachers conceive of themselves as further education teachers, how they respond to and overcome challenges and difficulties in their teaching career and finally how these factors influence their career progression. We emphasised the role of the teacher in making a difference to quality teaching and learning.

The second phase of the study (2017-19) expanded the qualitative data set and added a quantitative dimension. This involved developing, implementing and analysing two key surveys: one for staff and one for students. This enabled us to expand the theoretical underpinnings of the central concept of transformative teaching and learning that sits at the heart of the project. The first stage of the research used a sociological lens to uncover substantive evidence about how further education impacts hugely on research participants' identities as learners, their lives and the lives of their families and communities. The second phase sought to build on this and to flesh out key aspects of teachers' and students' experience in order to strengthen the psychological and quantitative basis for the claims we are making about transformative teaching and learning. Together the data from both phases constitutes a powerful evidence base to support the contention that the 'transformative' aspect of the research participants' educational experiences was an effect of a multitude of variables but that the teachers' role in this transformative aspect was a *crucial* facilitating factor.

Central to the project was the establishment of the UCU website, *Further Education in England: Transforming Lives and Communities*¹ as a 'live' interactive platform through which project findings can be uploaded and shared with an ever-growing project audience (Duckworth and Smith 2019B). The website provides timely evidence of how further education has played, and continues to play, a vital role in contributing to transforming lives, families and communities in Britain by providing educational opportunities across age ranges and disciplines and across communities. The research illuminates learners' and teachers' narratives, the overarching aim being to acknowledge, understand and celebrate the journeys of students and the work of teachers against the backdrop of wider socio-economic, political and historical contexts (Duckworth and Smith 2016, 2017A, 2018A, 2019B).

¹ transforminglives.web.ucu.org.uk

Why this research is important

Further education is often marginalised by policy. Indeed, as everyone who works in colleges knows, since 2009, further education in England and the UK has been subjected to deep cuts – and these cuts have gone far beyond anything endured by other sectors of education (Paton 2010). In effect, these cuts have hurt the communities that colleges serve and have penalised college staff who work hard day in and day out to provide transformative teaching and learning experiences. There is a host of research evidence that provides detail about the extent to which further education funding has been targeted in the last decade and the impact of this.

In their comparative study on levels of funding across further and higher education, referring to data on students and learners in two academic years: 2012/13 and 2013/14, Conlon and Halterbeck (2015) identify the overall reduction in expenditure on further education. Total funding:

- decreased from **£3.205 billion** to **£3.031 billion** between the two academic years of interest; however, this essentially reflects the decrease in the total number of 16-19 learners (from **685,000** in 2012/13 compared to **643,000** in 2013/14). (Conlon and Halterbeck 2015: 64-5)

In addition, they identify a decline in adult numbers:

- an **11%** decline in the number of 19+ learners from approximately **3.3 million** in 2012/13 to **2.9 million** in 2013/14. The contraction in the student body was especially pronounced among learners on non-apprenticeship programmes, decreasing (by **13%**) from approximately **2.6 million** in 2012/13 to **2.3 million** in 2013/14; (Conlon and Halterbeck 2015: 54)

The authors compare the funding reductions for further education provision with funding for students in Higher Education. They state:

- Funding per student within the Adult Skills system is extremely low in comparison to the level of funding associated with higher education... funding per apprentice aged 19 or above amounts to **£1,554** per annum, equivalent to **18%** of comparable higher education funding, while funding per non-apprentice learner stands at **£1,323** (equivalent to **15%** of annual funding per full-time undergraduate student from England attending HEIs in England in 2013/14).
- Funding for 16-19 education in General FE Colleges... is considerably smaller than funding for higher education students. Funding per 16-19 apprentice stands at **£3,759** per annum (equivalent to **42%** of higher education funding), while funding per 16-19 non-apprentice was estimated to be **£4,820** per learner per annum (equivalent to **54%** of the total public funding per full-time undergraduate student from England studying in England in 2013/14). (Conlon and Halterbeck 2015: iv)

In the continuing cuts overseen by government as part of their ongoing austerity measures, while school funding remained 'ring-fenced' (Peraudin and Winter 2015) – an ambiguous term which ultimately meant static – despite rising costs, pupil numbers and additional employer pension contributions – further education seems to have fared particularly badly. The severe reductions imposed at the beginning of the decade have continued to the present. Foster (2018: 4) states that:

- The total 16-19 programme and high needs funding allocated to providers fell from £6.09 billion in 2013-14 to £5.49 billion in 2018-19 – a reduction of 10% in cash terms and 17% in real terms.

Alongside this tremendous assault on college funding, there have been significant changes to the funding of education in colleges since 2010. Funding arrangements for 16-19 year old students changed in 2013 with the introduction of a so-called national funding formula. But the use of funding to incentivise changes originating in the latest policy anxiety have continued. So, from 2014, colleges faced reductions in funding if young people were not enrolled in English and maths (if they had not previously achieved a grade C or above in English and maths at GCSE). This use of *ad hoc* incentivisation has become a perennial feature of further education funding. In this case, colleges simply didn't have enough English and Maths teachers to meet this huge expansion in numbers. A detail that apparently did not occur to Learning and Skills Minister Matt Hancock. The result was that many teachers who are not qualified English and Maths teachers found themselves teaching these subjects.

Within this unjust targeting of further education, additional reforms have also impacted negatively. Another important change in the area of funding came about through the removal of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). The EMA was a means-tested universal benefit scheme that paid all 16-19 students between £10 and £30 per week while they attended college. The overall cost of this was £550m per year. Michael Gove replaced EMA with the Discretionary Learner Support Fund (DLSF) and payments to 'vulnerable students' – a scheme that was administered by colleges and cost £180m per annum in 2014/5 and 2015/16 (Hubble and Roberts 2017). This move appears to have been justified through reference to a single piece of research by NFER (Spielhofer et al 2010) which appeared to suggest that only 12% of students receiving EMA in a subset (838) of a sample of 2000 surveyed stated that they would not have attended college if they had not received the EMA (Chowen 2010). From this, the government interpreted a high percentage of EMA 'deadweight': '65 out of every 69 individuals aged 16 who are eligible for the EMA would have stayed in education without the payment' (Chowdry and Emmerson 2010).

The immediate savings from the abolition of EMA may have been great but the move to the discretionary bursary scheme effectively introduced structural inequality as individual colleges were put in charge of a (smaller) budget to distribute.

While the emphasis of the EMA which was "to incentivise participation in learning nationally, using the same criteria of eligibility for all learners", for the DLSF it was "to provide some financial assistance for only the learners in greatest need of assistance" (NFER (2011, p.2).

According to Hubble et al (2017: p), there has been a longer term effect of the policy. The change from EMAs to DLSFs meant that almost half of the young people who had received EMA money no longer received support.

- replacing EMAs with 16-19 bursaries was associated with a relatively modest decrease in participation and attainment in the first two years of the scheme's operation. **However, this disproportionately affected low-income young people.** (our emphasis).

Interestingly, there is no routine data published on the take-up of these bursaries. Research commissioned by the Government puts their number at 23,900 at a cost of £23.5 million (Roberts and Hubble 2017: 8). It is striking that while further education providers are deluged with demands for data on every aspect of their activities, a similar level of scrutiny is surprisingly absent when it comes to data about the impact of the financial support for students in further education.

According to a recent report by the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS), funding for teaching and learning in adult further education was chopped by 24% in real terms between 2010/11 and 2015/16. Alongside this, the Adult Skills Budget funding, which covers all education for people older than 19, declined by 29% in cash terms in the same period. Despite these cuts, the existing regime of funding and so-called 'accountability, (through Ofsted) has continued to enforce colleges' adherence to maintaining high standards of 'quality' through the production of favourable performance data. This systematic under-resourcing means that at the time of writing, 16-19 students in Birmingham are likely to be funded between £1000-£1500 less per year when they leave school go on to a local further education college than they were in 2010. (see Belfield et al 2018: 19-21).

The cuts need to be viewed in a context in which further education continues to provide education for around 40% of young people leaving school (Belfield et al 2018). They enrol in college often feeling they are 'unacademic' or even that they have 'failed' as learners. Often, they need a new and inspiring learning environment to remedy the negative prior educational experiences that they arrive with. Frequently, they need to recreate their spoilt identities as learners. It is the belief, commitment and passion of further education teachers that helps turn this situation around.

At this point, we need to be clear about the scope of the claims we are making about further education and transformative teaching and learning. This is because we recognise that this research needs to be contextualised within a broad discourse about education policy and that by its nature, this is a politically contested area of work. A mark of this is the extent to which the terms *transformation*, *transformative education*, *transformational learning*, *transforming lives* etc are being used (some might say ‘colonised’) by a range of different voices in the field of education. Most of these voices see education as a social good but clearly there is a risk of the notion of transformation being harnessed to a neoliberal project of uncritical, competitive individualism. Many of these voices share our concern that the enormous potential of colleges to contribute social and economic benefits – often to marginalised groups and through that to help realise social equality and justice – is being diminished and even squandered.

We are mindful then that transformative teaching and learning as a phrase and concept risks being emptied out of meaning by misuse and / or overuse. Our study needs to be framed by a broader policy critique of the marketization imposed by the Further and Higher Education Act (1992), which brought about the incorporation of colleges, since when further education has been viewed in increasingly reductive and instrumentalist terms by successive governments. Different elements combine to create the abstraction of ‘the FE sector’ that appears to shape policy makers’ decisions about further education. The growth of ‘datafication’ in education (Stevenson 2017) – the production of performance data and the tendency on the part of government to use this data to inform policy making in an undifferentiated and decontextualized way is an additional feature. These policies, in turn, reinforce a particular distorted ‘version’ of further education in ways that have been immensely damaging to teachers’ and students’ lives.

What this report is not claiming then is that *all* further education is transformational. Neither are we claiming that the so-called ‘FE sector’ is *inherently* or *essentially* transformational. Instead, this report provides substantial evidence that, despite a funding and policy environment that objectifies students and incentivises a transmission view of teaching and learning, across the broad spectrum of further education, amazing and inspiring stories are being played out. Typically, these are stories in which people – whose previous educational experience led them to believe that they were failed learners or ‘thick’ – have been helped to (re)discover that education can be a positive experience. These are stories in which students have been able to rearticulate a meaningful link between education and their lives. These are stories in which the personal, professional and educational relationships that college teachers establish with their students have created the conditions in which hope has flowered and dramatic changes have been made possible.

Underpinning these stories are the colleges: local, historically embedded institutions whose networks and rootedness make them such an important feature of municipal landscapes across the country. These important institutions may have managed (just about) to withstand the wrecking ball of austerity measures and budget cuts, but the undermining of their vital role in their communities through the incessant, interventionist policy churn issuing from the DfE / BIS (the vulnerability of further education may stem from its being positioned between government departments) has left them seriously weakened. The disruptive policy churn corresponds to the election cycle and the movement of ministers from one portfolio to another. The result: successive waves of ‘reform’, none being given time to ‘bed in’ properly, amounts to systemic governmental vandalism.

Research indicates that the funding methodology has also created huge problems and managerialist cultures have proliferated (see Randle and Brady 1997, Smith and O’Leary 2013, Bennett and Smith 2018). The narratives and the other evidence presented in this report illustrate the stubborn resilience of a set of values and a kind of teaching and learning that has withstood the onslaught of instrumentalist policy. Our argument is that further education is for everyone and has never been just about ‘skills’. It can provide a model for a renewed understanding of lifelong learning in which transformative teaching and learning could be the norm – enabling it to increase exponentially colleges’ contributions to the social and economic benefits they already make.

Evidence from this research demonstrates that transformative teaching and learning is directly linked to social mobility (although we develop a refreshed definition of this term, see Section 8 below (p52). It is grossly unfair therefore, that young people in further education colleges are receiving less funding per head than their peers in V1th forms in schools. Belfield *et al* (2018: 39) provide an important overview of the percentage of 16- and 17-year-olds taking different education and employment choices which shows how this discriminatory funding system targets a majority of young people.

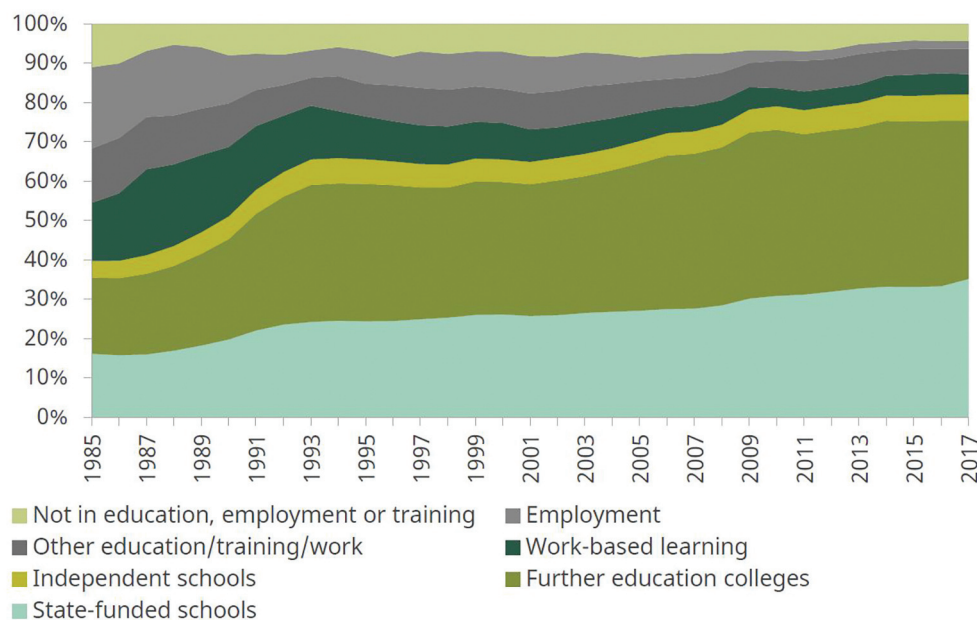


Figure 1 Percentage of 16- and 17-year-olds taking different education and employment choices (Chart reproduced by kind permission of the authors: Belfield *et al* 2018).

According to this chart, further education and V1th form colleges are the preferred route for the majority of 16 & 17 year olds and this proportion has increased steadily since incorporation (1993).

The development of the research

The Transforming Lives and Communities research commenced in the summer of 2016 and has to date gathered data from almost forty colleges across the UK. The first phase of the research gathered qualitative data nationally through more than fifty video interviews. The project used an interactive digital platform in an innovative way in order to i) present the data as it was gathered but also and importantly ii) to elicit responses and further narratives from further education students and practitioners in response to this data. When we established the website, while we planned for it to have an interactive dimension, we had no idea of the extent to which people would interact with it and provide their own stories about teaching and learning in further education colleges. This was an experimental aspect of the project and we were overwhelmed by the volume of responses and the level of engagement. The website flourished and garnered a large number of narratives and biographical accounts from every region in the UK (see pages 19 & 20).

This report gathers together and synthesises the data from each strand of the research design to provide a rich source of evidence to contribute to the development of a socially just educational framework and to help inform and facilitate further education's empowering, inclusive and transformative capacity to work within and across communities.

How who we are as researchers shaped the research

As critical educators as well as researchers, throughout this research project we have and continue to critically engage in examining our own practice, the premise being: how can we critically examine others' claims to knowledge without knowing our own positioning and making that transparent? For that reason, we will briefly outline our own backgrounds in order to frame what follows.

Rob's Journey

■ *I attended a multicultural comprehensive school in Birmingham in the 1970s and followed a traditional route, doing A levels and then after a year working abroad studied English in London before doing a PGCE and becoming a secondary English teacher. While in secondary I saw the introduction of the National Curriculum and the Local Management of Schools. I then got a job in a further education college in September 1992 and witnessed the changes brought about by incorporation at first hand. The experience was 'character-building'. The next ten years were characterised by involvement in trade union activity and a long-running contract dispute. My doctorate issued from these experiences as I sought to understand how policy in further education (and more widely) was impacting on teachers' work and the culture of college management and leadership. From there, I strengthened my understanding of further education in a teacher education role at the University of Wolverhampton. This involved circulating around lots of colleges in the West Midlands region supporting students and seeing the ongoing impact of funding and marketisation.*

Vicky's Journey

■ *At sixteen I left behind the local comprehensive school where I'd spend most of the day staring out at the clueless sky. I couldn't wait to be grown up, working and earning. The school bell ringing for the last time, see me and my mates breaking free, as we run through the green gates. Full of laughter and screams, we chase one another across the school fields, egging each other's white shirts. Excited to be leaving the classroom behind, I didn't realise back then that I'd never see some of those kids that I'd grown up with. Our lives would fork in different directions, directions of no return. I swapped my school socks for tights and started my first job on a Youth Training Scheme which paid twenty-five pounds a week; I worked in a couple of local factories before the penny dropped and the monotony set in. I wanted more – didn't know what that more was I wanted more than time passing behind the redbrick that had seen my nana and granddad grind away their years.*

Rather than the factory becoming a way of life, it offered me resistance and a determination to challenge being unskilled and without qualifications. Starting at the local further education college was liberating and filled me with endless possibilities. From the college I moved onto training at the hospital for a career as a registered nurse and then a midwife. Independence has always been important to me and having a career that involved caring for others across lifespans was fulfilling and also offered me choices and routes. I worked in the hospital and as a voluntary adult literacy teacher; from here I went onto work for a number of years in further education, and then higher education. My upbringing, along with my relationships with other educators and students, has impacted on me as an adult educator and a researcher. Further education gave me a voice; a voice that is empowering and reaches out to empower others.

The research project that underpins this report explores how consciousness-raising and dissemination of narratives about further education in the local, national and international domain can engage learners, teachers and communities in learning and participatory knowledge production. As such, the research itself coheres with the values of the researchers in seeking to provide the conditions for nurturing hope and working towards social justice.

Research approaches

- The project makes use of the UCU Transforming Lives digital platform in order to enhance its democratic and dialogical approach to knowledge production. A key aspect of this is the use of video recorded interviews which are edited and posted on a dedicated project Youtube channel². These videos are also then embedded in a narrative frame on the UCU project website.
- The website features perspectives from learners, teachers, family members, employers, community members and policy makers.
- Participants were consulted throughout, before their narratives were placed in the public domain. Their views about final videos were sought and the videos re-edited in response to their viewing and recommendations. Our aim with these videos is to present individuals' stories in a powerful way.
- Alongside providing insights into the history of the diverse communities we entered, the key focus was on researching learners' stories of transformative teaching and learning through access to and participation in further education, their prior educational and social experience (including their socio-economic background) and the intergenerational and wider impact of their educational experience.
- There is also a strand that connects to notions of capital; this is an aspect that impacts on choice and transitions.
- A further main strand explores transformative teaching and learning from teachers' perspectives.

² www.youtube.com/channel/UCkDeirtGCmeBs361BgibXnA

Research aims

Our aims in carrying out this research was to turn a spotlight onto the powerful and important work that further education colleges do. We wanted to focus on the social benefits that typically are not measured in a sector that in response to government and funding policies has built up cultures and practices that focus instead on 'measurable' outcomes. Our belief in carrying out this research was that these metrics alone give an inaccurate and slanted view of the enormous importance of further education.

The narratives of transformative teaching and learning presented here are a way of articulating some of these hidden benefits and of getting at the full value of further education as provided by local colleges. The study examined what makes further education unique. Another aim of the project was to celebrate these achievements and affirm the positive identities being forged in college classrooms across the nation. But we wanted the celebration to move beyond the noise of applause for success and instead to connect the stories fully to the background issues (often rooted in social inequality) that lie behind the successes and achievements. The research necessarily aimed to foreground and to problematize these to document a fuller picture of what further education means and where it is positioned in our social fabric. In capturing this information, the research team sought to provide answers to a set of research questions.

Research questions

The first year of our study sought to provide answers to the following questions:

- How does further education provide routes to higher education for learners who would not otherwise access it?
- How does further education offer learners the chance to engage in education at multiple stages of life, recognising that their relationships to employment/education are not neat and linear?
- What approaches and strategies are utilised to successfully support the integration of recent arrivals to the UK through ESOL provision?
- In what ways does further education provide vocational education at all levels on a holistic personalised basis that are successful in providing learners with the confidence, knowledge and skills to progress?
- What is special and particular about the learning experiences offered by niche further education provision (e.g. land-based, arts, SLD / SEN provision, and provision for excluded 14-16s and 14-16 yr olds who want to follow vocational courses in colleges in preference for school)?
- How can we improve on the efficacy and appropriateness of the current funding and accountability regime in order to develop a model that supports transformative further education?

Questions that arose also included:

- How does further education help provide routes into education, training and employment?
- How does further education offer learners the chance to engage in education at multiple stages of life, recognising that their relationships to employment /education are not neat and linear?
- What is special and particular about further education in encouraging social mobility - particularly for students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds - by increasing the range and types of student support available?
- What are the short term and longer term impacts on individuals' lives – including on their confidence, resilience, and careers?
- What is the wider impact on their families and communities?

For Phase Two a further set of research questions was addressed, as follows:

- What are the factors that influence teachers to choose further education teaching as a career?
- What are teachers' understandings of themselves as further education teachers; how do they judge their competence, do they feel in control of their teaching and do they feel valued in their role?
- How does teachers' understanding of themselves as a further education teachers, influence their progression in the sector?
- How do teachers respond to and overcome challenges and difficulties in teaching in colleges?
- What factors underpin Continuous Professional Development differences in further education that teachers regard as 'effective'? Do they stem from teachers' understanding of themselves as professionals?

Digitising the Research

The *Transforming Lives* project has gained considerable traction nationally and internationally.

To date, the virtual UCU *Transforming Lives* website has had 22,271 sessions, 14,000 users and more than 87,724 page views (Wordpress Google analytics). The project twitter account has 1603 followers. (as of June 2019)

Project methodology

The research utilised a mixed method approach to capture the rich narratives not just of the students but of their teachers, family members, friends, community voices, employers and, in some cases, communities as well. The diversity of the participants necessitated an exploration of their views framed by a broad analysis of the educational landscape. Participants engaged with the project because they had a positive story to tell. The research approach itself became a part of the affirmative practice that helped create the conditions for the transformative learning that participants had often experienced. In that sense, taking part in the research reinforced the positive learning identities that the participants talk about having achieved.

The methodological approach adopted in this study sought to be forward-looking; to endorse newly established learning identities and to share in a collective imagining of future plans. We drew on participatory methodologies where the oppressive qualities of the 'researcher' and the 'researched' relationship were challenged, this cohered with our intention to position social justice at the core of the undertaking. As such we strove then to convene research discussions in a safe space, a space moreover that shared some characteristics with critical pedagogical space. Underpinning this was a sense of research as a social practice (Herndl & Nahrwold 2000) i.e. not divorced from everyday relations or having any 'mystique' that might in any way make participants feel like 'subjects'. Instead, just as education can be experienced as a socially embedded process that is to a greater or lesser degree conditioned by the social forces and structures that shape our society, so as researchers we were aware of how research can reduce to a limited and convention-ridden exchange between people who do not enjoy an equal social footing (Duckworth and Smith 2019A). As such, the methodological approach adopted for the study was closely aligned to critical pedagogy (Freire 1995, Breunig 2005) and extended a number of its underpinning principles.

Research conversations (early on we rejected the term 'interviews' because of the connotations it carried of an unequal and uni-directional exchange and distribution of power) were framed to foster and sustain a sense of equality between participants. This term better reflects the egalitarian atmosphere we tried to achieve while conducting the research. For us, it was vital to achieve a relationship of trust with participants so that they were active in the co-construction of knowledge and meaning that sat at the heart of the research process. We shared our stories of further education and our educational journeys with participants as we acknowledged that these encounters had a social significance above and beyond the 'research' element. These meetings were typically reciprocal and dialogical as stories were exchanged and opinions and feelings shared. They were also often affirmative in tone as we talked with participants about how they had '(re)learned to learn' and how this had brought about changes in the ways they felt about themselves and about their future.

While participants understood that they could remain anonymous, most wanted their real names used, seeing this as an affirmative aspect of participation in the project. Colleges and teachers that were mentioned were anonymised or permission was sought to include names. The question we as researchers thought it important to ask ourselves when producing this knowledge and disseminating it was: what meanings were being foregrounded? Where were participants being positioned? What impact might dissemination have on their hopes and trajectories? Participants' experience of education frequently involved symbolic violence that sought to position them at the bottom of an existing social order. But symbolic violence does not only occur in educational circles. A critical and reflexive research methodology has to be conscious of the potential for research interactions to visit just the same kind of violence of definition and imposed meanings and of use on participants and their stories.

The dissemination of the research in the local, national and international domain through the website can be viewed as crossing spaces and boundaries in an attempt at consciousness-raising as it can engage learners and communities in the development of knowledge that can inspire hope and work towards social justice.

Phase two of the research utilised two surveys: one for staff and one for students. There are important methodological considerations to be taken into account in this. There were several aims behind the use of surveys to gather data about transformative teaching and learning. Foremost amongst these was a drive to get a sense of how widespread was the recognition of the narratives of transformative teaching and learning that we had gathered in Phase One. Survey respondents were asked to familiarise themselves with the existing data on the project website prior to completing the survey. The use of video was key here as we were conscious of the limitations of communicating a concept using only language and some kind of prescriptive definition.

Two national online surveys – one for staff and one for students – were then developed and distributed using snowball sampling via regional and national networks. The teachers' survey used items that were developed from the qualitative data such as:

- *I try to map students' lives onto the curriculum.*
- I try to develop relations of trust with students.*
- I try to ensure assessment addresses students' individual needs not just accreditation.*
- I try to provide emotional support for my students, when necessary.*
- I try to ensure that my students feel respected and valued.*
- I try to foster students' autonomy.*

In addition to items that originated in our findings from the qualitative data, some items drew on psychological research in education where we saw connections. For example, the last two items in the examples above map against self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 2000, Niemiec et al 2010) in which psychological theorists foreground the importance of autonomy and competence in teaching and learning environments. These two factors are also linked strongly to students' motivation. Self-determination theory posits that: 'satisfaction of both autonomy and competence needs is essential to maintain intrinsic motivation' (Niemiec and Ryan 2009: 135).

We see the adoption of this cross-disciplinary approach as important for a number of reasons. The first of these connects with the cross-disciplinary nature of the concept of transformative learning identified by Mezirow (2009). But we also took this approach because we believe the classification of sociological and psychological disciplines and the insulation between them have become entrenched (and some would argue politicised) in ways that are unhelpful and constraining not least in educational research. Clearly, notions of 'mindset' (Dweck 2006) are capable of providing insights into teaching and learning (at the level of the individual) which can sit alongside ideas about the impact of social class (Willis 1977) or race (Gillborn 2008) or other sociological perspectives. For that reason we believe that establishing the (complementary) psychological basis for our formulation of transformative teaching and learning can add weight to the research. Niemiec and Ryan's work is interesting because it suggests that the introduction of what they call 'controlling conditions', close supervision, monitoring and evaluations undermines 'the sense of relatedness between teachers and students' and displaces the 'natural' feelings of 'joy, enthusiasm and interest' that students should experience in educational activity with experiences of 'anxiety, boredom or alienation' (p134). In addition they state:

- The more that teachers' satisfaction of autonomy is undermined, the less enthusiasm and creative energy they can bring to their teaching endeavours. Second, the pressures toward specified outcomes found today in so many educational settings promotes teachers' reliance on extrinsically focused strategies that crowd out more effective, interesting and inspiring teaching practices that would otherwise be implemented." (p140)

This insight resonates strongly with the project data. In many ways this speaks to the picture from existing research of college environments that are funding-driven, data-fixated and disfigured by managerialist cultures. The factors that feed into self-determination theory are related to the social conditions experienced by students and teachers and connect in particular to a feature of teacher/student relations that we call 'care'. This also fits with a view of teaching as being more than understanding 'how the brain works': – some kind of technical exercise that assumes that universal physiological qualities can usefully be seen as over-riding the myriad other variables that affect student learning.

The cross-disciplinary approach we adopted in Phase Two of the project also resonates with work in mental health research. A recent report published by the British Psychological Society takes a position in relation to mental ill health and psychological conditions that moves away from the pathologisation of individuals and treatment of them through medicalisation. Instead it proposes an understanding of 'the behaviour and experience of persons within their social and relational environments rather than (just through) the (mal)functioning of bodies' (Johnstone and Boyle 2018: 37). We find echoes of project participants' narratives of transformative teaching and learning in Johnstone and Boyle's suggested use of "the construction, or co-construction, of personal narratives (that can) open up the possibility for different, non-diagnostic stories of strength and survival." (ibid p192) This is part of a new way of seeing and working with people in the field of mental health using what the authors call a Power Threat Meaning Framework. We see the psychological aspect of the survey design as an additional feature that can help in the construction of a broad conceptualisation of transformative teaching and learning.

The student survey garnered 630 responses almost equally divided between male and female students. The age range of respondents was from 14-16 yr olds (24%) through to 35+ (15%) but the majority of respondents were aged 17-19 (40%). The majority of respondents (81%) were full time students. Respondents were attending colleges across the country as can be seen in the chart below.

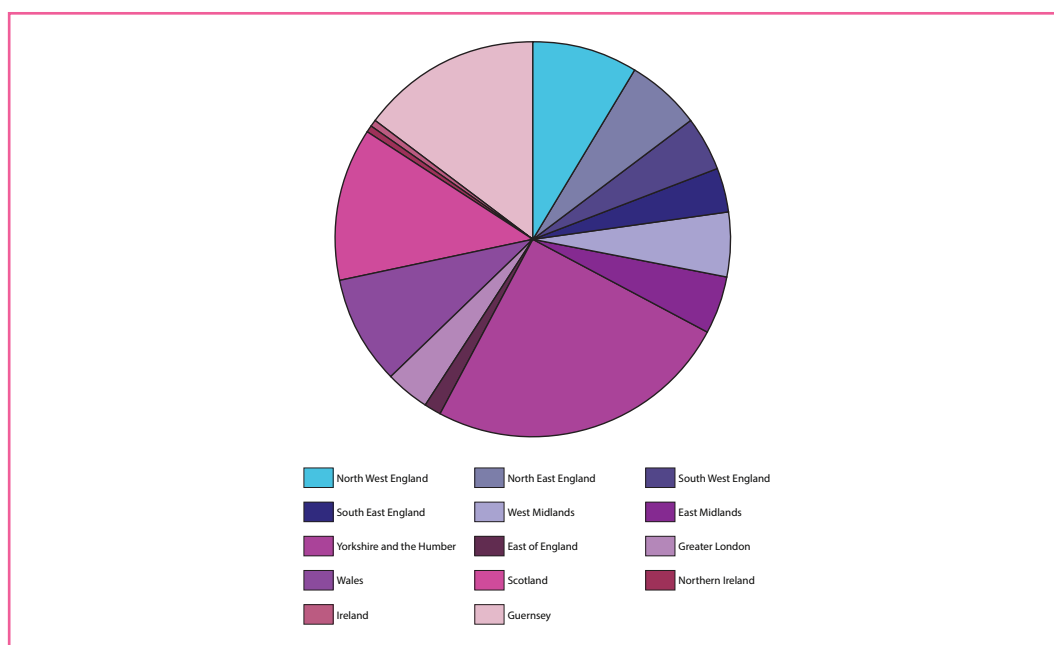


Figure 2 Geographical location of colleges of survey respondents (students)

The teacher survey garnered 730 responses 62% of whom identified as female. Respondents were asked to indicate their age against a range of categories and responded as follows: 21-34 (14%), 35-44 (23%), 45-54 (34%) and 55 and over (29%). 72% of respondents were on full time contracts. In terms of the number of years' experience teaching in further education the data were as follows: 0-5 years (20%), 5-10 years (20%), 10-15 years (24%), 15-20 years (19%) and over 20 years (17%). 72% of respondents were teachers, the rest were senior leaders, managers and others. Importantly, while a large majority of respondents were working in colleges, 19% were working in training providers and other further education institutions. Similarly to the student survey, the staff survey respondents came from across the country as can be seen in the following chart.

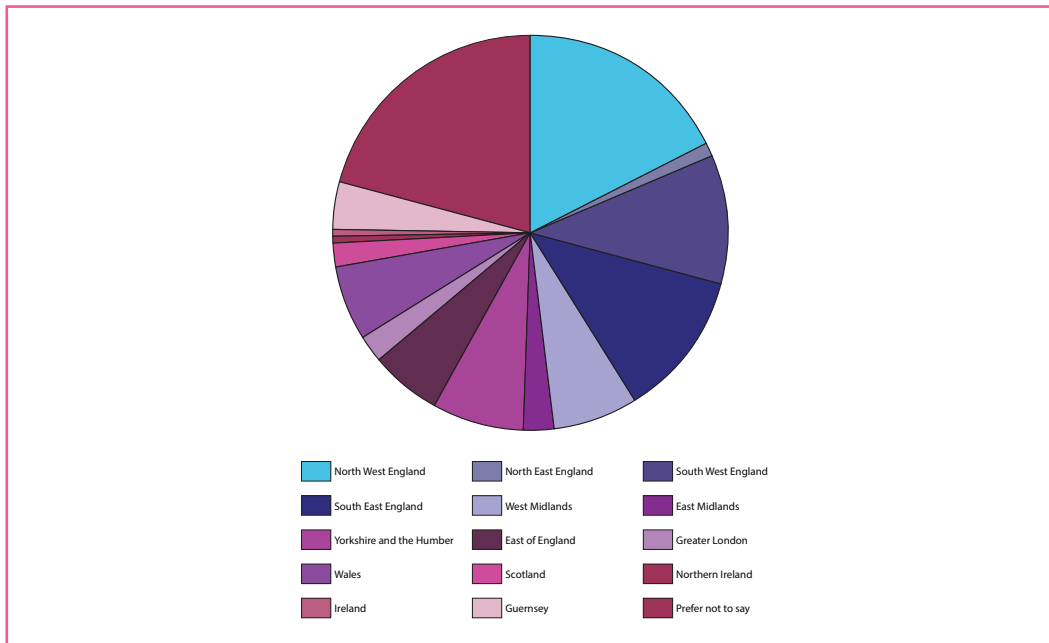


Figure 3 Geographical location of respondents to staff survey

As with the student survey, the chart above shows that survey respondents were working in colleges from all regions and countries of the UK and included small numbers from Ireland as well. A significant number indicated that they preferred not to say which region / college they were working in. This is an index of the extent to which respondents might have felt vulnerable about sharing their views about their practice. This vulnerability is a clear indicator of i) teachers' lack of job security in the current funding environment and ii) the 'high-stakes' market cultures within which the voices of teachers are discouraged and even deprecated and silenced. This then connects with the claims we are making about transformative teaching and learning that we have already touched on. It also presages the way we develop and refine our definition through reference to the project data below.

The distribution also connects to the way in which the sample was generated. The survey link was distributed through professional networks and then on social media and via the project website in an open invitation to respondents to provide their views, opinions and experiences of transformative teaching and learning.

Whilst this research has been broadly welcomed, we are aware that there has also been some suspicion of the project's goals. For us, this connects to a healthy scepticism about the instrumentalist discourses that have attached to further education over the last quarter century. Generally speaking, these discourses promote an abstracted view of further education as a problem-free panacea for employers' (and the nation's) skills needs. It is easy to see how the tag of 'transformation' might feature as a magical signifier in an instrumentalist and heuristic lexicon. This scepticism might also feed off a warranted fatigue with the effects of marketization on language use. The tendency to use overblown and exaggerated terms in making claims about the impact of further education is (by now) an established trope. Think of the advertisements for the local college in your town / city / borough: is it not claiming that it can 'Maximise your potential' or otherwise that 'Your future starts here!' or an injunction to 'Follow your dreams'? While all of these may be sincerely meant and may be grounded in the stories of real students, the critical reader cannot be concerned that the underpinning and over-riding impulse behind such slogans is a commercial one.

It is within this linguistic context that asking teachers and students to complete a survey about transformative teaching and learning (notwithstanding the invitation to browse through the project website) might be expected to elicit a polarised response: any respondent might be expected to be already viewing the concept in a positive light before completing the survey. In that sense, the survey might be accused of acting as an echo chamber which serves to amplify a set of pre-existing views and opinions.

Inevitably, then, there are limitations to this study – despite a design that sought to combine qualitative and quantitative data. With regards to the survey data, these limitations include an acknowledgement that generalisability of findings from the survey sample is not possible as the sample was not random and cannot be claimed to be representative of all teachers or students in the sector.

An alternative way of viewing the project is to see it as an exercise in dynamic meaning-making: we used a **website** and **videos** of the interviews as tools to communicate a message about the power of further education to teachers, learners, policy makers and the public. These include nested narratives: about teachers, learners, family members, community and employers.

The project harnesses the powerful democratic potential of digital media to communicate information, narratives and values to an increasingly digitally-adept public. In that sense, the website acts as more than a repository and is indeed crucial in allowing us not only to disseminate the research findings but also to invite engagement with a wider audience (Duckworth and Smith 2018A, 2019B). The stories of the participants are inspirational in the messages of hope they communicate. As such they can provide a resource and a roadmap for others who face similar challenging circumstances. The website offers a forum on which people can contribute narratives about their own transformative learning experiences and **Twitter** has become a way of connecting the *Transforming Lives* research project to a growing audience. These voices (often silenced in the public domain) are role models and a source of social capital that reaches across physical barriers. For example, as identified by Hughes et al (2015) rural circumstances can prevent access to learning and employability including lone parents.

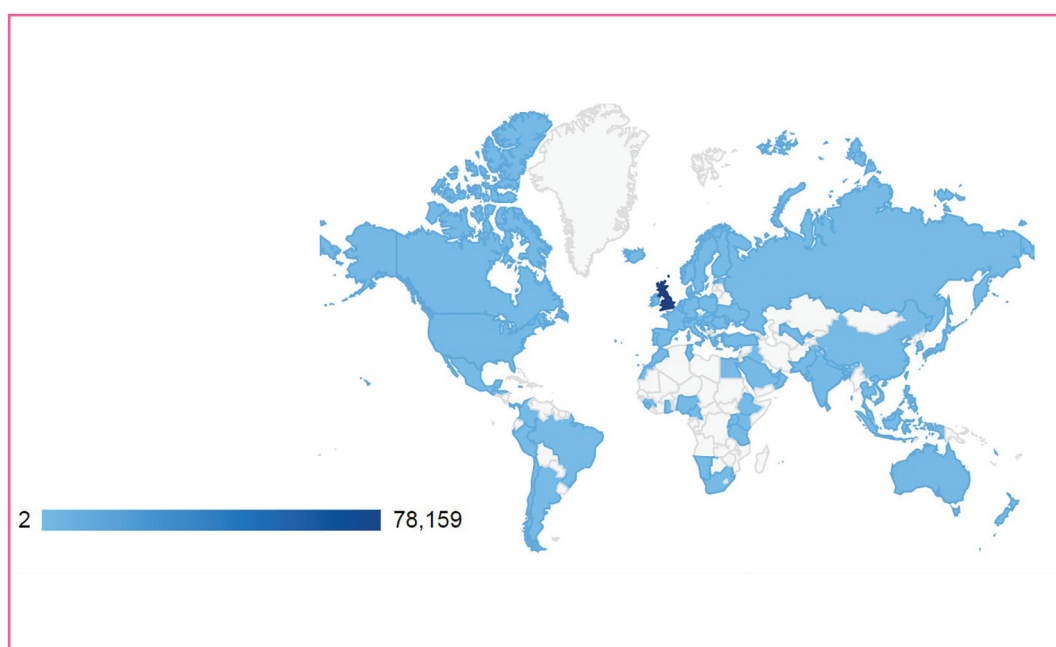


Figure 4 Geographical location of people accessing the Transforming Lives website

The project's theoretical lenses

The project was founded on a simple premise: that for some people further education colleges provide a lifeline and a (re)introduction to learning that has the power to transform their lives. We knew this from our personal and professional experience of working in further education as teachers but also, and alongside it, as teacher educators and researchers. We wanted to explore the extent of these stories but also to look for patterns in them in order to identify if transformative learning could be regarded as a unitary concept. In addition, we wanted to find out if the transformative stories of students found their complement in transformative pedagogical approaches. In other words, if there was such a thing as transformative learning, was it an experience originating in the realisation of potential within the individual or was it enabled or facilitated by teachers and / or the social conditions of learning that they established? In our experience, critical reflection and dialogue can facilitate the move from a transmission and / or competence-based curriculum to a holistic approach which we suggest empowers the learners and their communities. Our report illustrates that transformative teaching and learning are two, interdependent sides of a whole. Teachers can provide the (transformative) conditions but students are the authors of the change, growth and development.

That college teachers' work is frequently 'under the radar', and can centre on the biographical background of individuals was key in the analysis. Such holistic approaches were identified in much of the research produced in the Transforming Learning Cultures (TLC) further education strand of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) that ran between 2001-8 (e.g. Hodkinson, Biesta and James 2007, Gleeson and James 2007). This is a model of professional practice that is focused on the needs of students as a necessary precursor to learning. It pays close attention to student biographies (Biesta and Tedder 2007) and addresses issues arising with a view to scaffolding the classroom experience. In many cases, without this scaffolding, further education students simply would not be able to learn never mind achieve.

Transformative teaching and learning experiences are largely hidden from view because their impact falls outside the metrics that drive further education policy and underpin funding in the UK. Their wider impact remains unmeasured by blunt assessment. We argue that further education programmes should be viewed through the lens of transformative teaching and learning as this enables a reclaiming of educational space and purposes that do not objectify students in instrumentalist ways (Duckworth and Smith 2018A) and instead offer a renewed hope and dignity which is a catalyst to higher education and beyond. The research data illustrate that further education offers organic transformative tools for consciousness-raising (Freire 1995) and a caring space where hope can act as a change agent that fuels learners' lives and teachers' practice (Duckworth 2013; Duckworth and Smith 2017A, 2017B, 2019A).

Through the course of the project we have also developed a theoretical position that anchors the research in learners and practitioners' experience as an empirical antidote to the simulations (Baudrillard 1994, Lefebvre 2004) conjured up by the decontextualised knowledge production activities that marketization has imposed on educational institutions. What we mean by this is that the market established by the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992, created the conditions in which the social practices of teaching and learning were shaped in ways that have had a negative impact on teaching and learning experiences of teachers and students. This is a product of the market conditions that demand a focus on targets, administration and the production of positive performance data. This market model has shifted the focus of further education so that there is a risk that it is organised around the needs of colleges (and beyond them of government departments) rather than being dedicated to meeting the needs of students and their communities. We position education research as having an important role to play in revealing powerful often hidden social practices and lived human experience beneath the neoliberal, globalised 'grand narratives' of international competition. To that end, we contextualise the term transformative teaching and learning and mobilise it to signify educational experiences that are not only 'student-centred', but which defy, counteract and work against the neoliberal educational imaginary.

The research also utilises sociological theories of **capital** to explore the structural context and to further understand notions of choice / no choice among diverse groups of people (Duckworth and Smith, 2018A). Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes three fundamental forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social. Economic capital may be manifested in family income and wealth. Reay, Crozier, & James (2011) argue that access to these capitals is socially structured and patterned, typically to the advantage of white middle-class students. Cultural capital may be defined as symbolic resources or goods that may be transmitted from generation to generation among the middle and upper classes in order to maintain class status. The resonance with the *Transforming Lives* project here relates to social justice. In common with many educationalists, we see education as an engine of social justice. In other words, we see education as having an important role in addressing the social division and inequality that exists in our society. Further education is key in this as, among other things, it provides routes into university. Accessing higher education provides opportunities for people to enhance their social, cultural and economic capital. Ball *et al* (2002) draw on the notion of 'embedded choosers' arguing that some young people have access to rich and diverse forms of capital. University for this group is seen as part of a natural progression. For others though, the encouragement, support and recognition of teachers and peers in further education colleges can be critical. The capitals conferred by birth may advantage some young people and adults, but the stories coming out of this project show that capitals are not fixed and that positive change through education can and does happen.

Data, themes and findings

Further education: agency, pathways and the fabric of hope

We live in a world of great complexity in which social inequalities have become increasingly evident, both within local communities at a micro level and between the global north and south from a macro perspective. Living in 'liquid' and uncertain times (Bauman, 2007), in which the impact of the 2008 banking crash still resonates locally and internationally (Dorling, 2011), we are experiencing political upheavals and their consequences for people and the communities we serve and beyond (Duckworth and Smith 2017A, 2019B).

We are at a pivotal moment where abundant evidence of social inequality and widespread demands for social justice require more than a rhetorical response. This evidence requires us to direct our focus, energy and resources as a society in general and as educationalists in particular to generate genuine and sustained social and educational change that meets the needs of all. This research positions further education at the heart of the debate. Our contention is that further education colleges are a national resource that is currently being misused and squandered. The instrumentalist view of further education that has dominated policy making for the last quarter century has limited colleges' ability to function in a broader way that addresses localised social and economic needs. Despite this, further education maintains its unique position in the British education system. The historical and socially-embedded nature of the colleges in towns and cities across the nation and the breadth of its functions are what gives further education its strength. These colleges, often with their roots in local industry and with a history closely linked to the socio-economic circumstances of the people and areas in which they are situated, have established relationships with communities, employers, students and local authorities all of which positions them as potential key players in tackling social inequality.

Further education provides a multitude of social benefits that have remained largely unmeasured – precisely because they can be hard to quantify. The UCU Transforming Lives research project aims to provide rigorous and rich evidence for the important benefits that accrue from further education that are often not reflected in traditional measures of success. As such it consciously aims to cut across the grain of the current skills policy discourse, in order to provide a rounded picture of the impact of transformative teaching and learning, what underpins it and how it has been able to take root and flourish in the sometimes stony ground of the further education 'sector'.

In what follows we have organised the findings under thematic headings. Throughout, we combine findings from the first phase of the research, which was primarily qualitative and comprised of video interviews, and the second phase which comprised of two surveys: one for further education staff and another for further education students.

1. The teacher's role

We begin our commentary on the findings from the research with data gathered from the interviews and online narratives provided by teachers. This is a deliberate decision on our part as the extensive research carried out into teachers' work roles and professional identities has identified a trend towards devaluation. Stephen Ball's (2003) perspectives that teachers in general under marketised systems are being reduced to 'technicians' who deliver curricula rather in the way that a robot might, is one of many critiques. Literature that focuses on further education in particular speaks of the de-professionalisation (Yarrow and Esland 1998: 11) and even proletarianisation (Randle and Brady 1997: 134) of further education teachers. Data from the survey can be interpreted as supporting a view that teachers' conditions have worsened and their work has intensified.

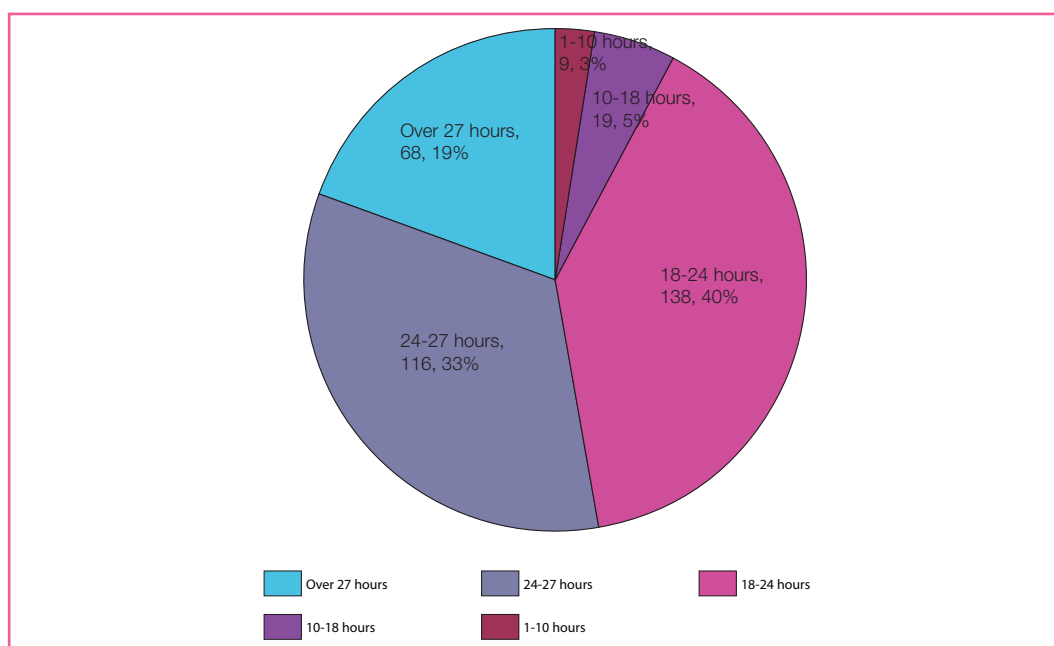


Figure 5 Hours spent teaching per week (full time teachers only, n = 350)

The pie chart above shows that 52% of respondents are in classrooms teaching for more than 24 hours a week. It is a staple of managerialist discourses in further education to deny that increasing a teachers' weekly contact time will result in a decline in 'quality' which may explain these high figures. This rationale can be seen as dominating further education settings for the last quarter century. We consider it an appropriate time to evaluate this common sense view which has worked to generally to increase teachers' contact time in further education. In the current context, while there are no nationally recognised upper limits on contact time in colleges, it has been left to organised labour to call out excessive hours, usually on the basis of the health and safety of members. The enforcement of local negotiation by teachers' trade unions in colleges can mean that teachers' working conditions and the working week of individuals depends on the relative power of local branches. Consequently, that can mean, in a financially insecure college with a bullish management, college teachers are forced to take on additional hours in the name of 'efficiency'. This doesn't only mean that working in colleges is less attractive, we contend that it has damaging consequences for the conditions in which transformative teaching and learning takes place – as we will outline below.

While secondary school teachers are reported as teaching between 20 and 21 hours per week (Sellen 2016: 18), our sample suggests that a much higher total of teaching hours per week is common in colleges. At the upper end of this, 19% - very nearly a fifth of respondents reported teaching more than 27 hours per week. Anyone who has taught full time knows that a weekly workload of that number of hours for longer than a few weeks is likely to lead to health problems. In the context of this report, when viewed alongside other factors, we would argue that such a workload will considerably reduce teachers' ability to facilitate transformative teaching and learning. The following figure gives an indication of the amount of time per week respondents were spending on administrative tasks.

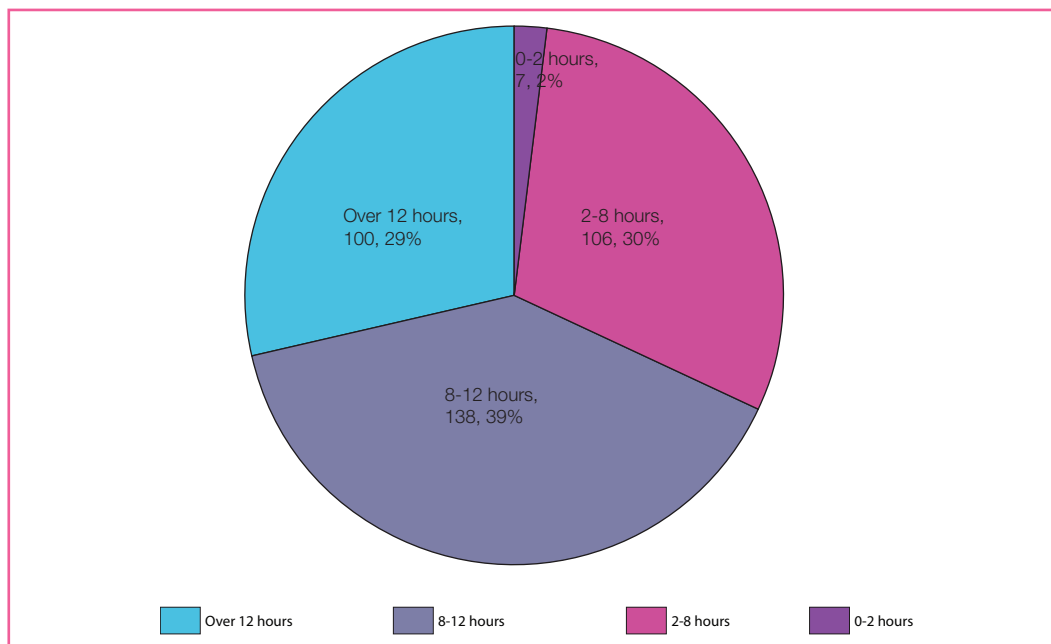


Figure 6 Hours spent working on administrative tasks per week (full time teachers only, n = 351)

The data above is suggestive of a broader context in which the administrative work of teachers is high. While teachers may be key in creating the conditions in which transformative learning takes place, college senior leaders and managers are responsible for creating the social conditions in which teachers work. But they in turn are constrained by the external pressures of accountability for quality assurance for Ofsted and funding agencies. How these pressures are mediated while a culture that is supportive of teachers' efforts to do more than simply spoon-feed students for assessment purposes is all-important. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate how the market environment brought about by the Further and Higher Education Act has led to heavy workloads and conditions in which the kinds of educational relationship that underpin transformative teaching and learning are unlikely to thrive.

Some of this critique draws on the impact of the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) that presaged a national contracts dispute in colleges and led to a worsening of terms and conditions for teachers (see Smith 2015). But it is an argument that is more telling in the light of the Lingfield Report (Lingfield 2012) that, in an effort to justify the removal of public funding from the Institute for Learning, revoked the mandatory qualification for further education teachers. This was something, it was argued, that could be left to the discretion of college principals and presumably, 'the market'. How it is possible to remove a regulatory requirement for college teachers to be qualified educators (with, as we have seen, potentially unlimited hours) and continue with an (Ofsted) inspection regime focused on 'standards' and the 'quality' of outcomes is a question that has yet to be answered.

The role of teachers in facilitating dialogic care

The commentary on our findings begins with teachers because the data indicates that they do not have a merely 'technical' or extraneous role in transformative teaching and learning. According to our research data, teachers in further education play a vital role in creating the social conditions and establishing the strong relational ties through which transformative learning takes place (Duckworth and Smith, 2016). As a starting point, their practice needs to take account of the negative prior educational experiences of learners who in many cases have been judged and written off by a rigidly linear school system that assesses individuals against a normative, age-staged matrix of 'learning progression'. These teachers understand that in some cases it has taken enormous courage on the part of some would-be adult learners to cross the threshold onto college premises. An initial focus of their work is to create a safe learning environment, establish trust and build confidence. The teachers form affective bonds and these bonds arise from an awareness of the historical positioning of the learners and their communities and how their location has shaped their trajectories (Duckworth and Smith, 2018C).



Judith Access to HE teacher

One participant, **Judith**, an Access to HE teacher, was conscious of the importance of her teaching work in a region with historically high levels of unemployment and job losses.

- *For me transformational teaching is teaching that makes a difference. Whether it's people enjoying the lesson... or sometimes... people have come in and they've been very quiet and haven't had much confidence. You'll see them five or ten years later and they'll say I'm a primary school teacher now or I'm a social worker or I'm doing my master's degree, I'm doing my PhD. And you think: Wow what a difference!*

What's interesting about the description is that Judith sees the transformative potential as immanent in the students. Judith sees this transformative process as a collective phenomenon and as having social as well as individual origins:

- *People feel once they get to their twenties or thirties, Oh I didn't stick in at school or I'm not clever enough or I'm never going to do anything. And it only takes one person in a friendship group to go and do something like an Access Course and go on and do well and then their friends want to come on as well. ...*

What's interesting about the description is that Judith sees the transformative potential as immanent in the students. Judith sees this transformative process as a collective phenomenon and as having social as well as individual origins:

Judith here signals how the impact of the Access course on an individual often led to the recruitment of others from that individual's social network. Judith identifies some important ingredients in the formation of dialogic caring relationships with the learners. Amongst these, although not specifically named, is the respect she has for them as people. Once more the egalitarian nature of transformative teaching and learning comes across powerfully:

- *We try to get to know the students as people and be part of their journey... A lot of people think they're not academic when actually, they are... They're so used to thinking of all the things they can't do, we've got to focus on what they can do... By the time they finish they realise that they can do the same as those people they thought were better than them because they had a degree or they are a doctor. I've had people say to me: ... I've learned how to phone up and complain if I'm not happy about something. I've learnt to say, I disagree with that. At the end of the day they are empowered and they have more confidence.*

Getting to know students involves supporting them and being interested in them as people outside the classroom. Data from the survey supports this perspective and gives a vantage point on a kind of educational space and interaction that is not accounted for in existing metrics. Figure 6 below gives a picture of the amount of time respondents spend per week supporting students outside of classroom time. While this time is not counted as so-called 'contact' time, our research shows that it underpins the kind of educational relationships that make transformative teaching and learning possible. Typically, it is elastic time. It may involve providing additional support for students to complete classroom work but interview data suggests that it spills over into helping individuals manage bigger personal issues (housing, travel, relationships, food, money), issues that sit outside the taught curriculum but, if they are not resolved, make learning difficult or impossible to achieve.

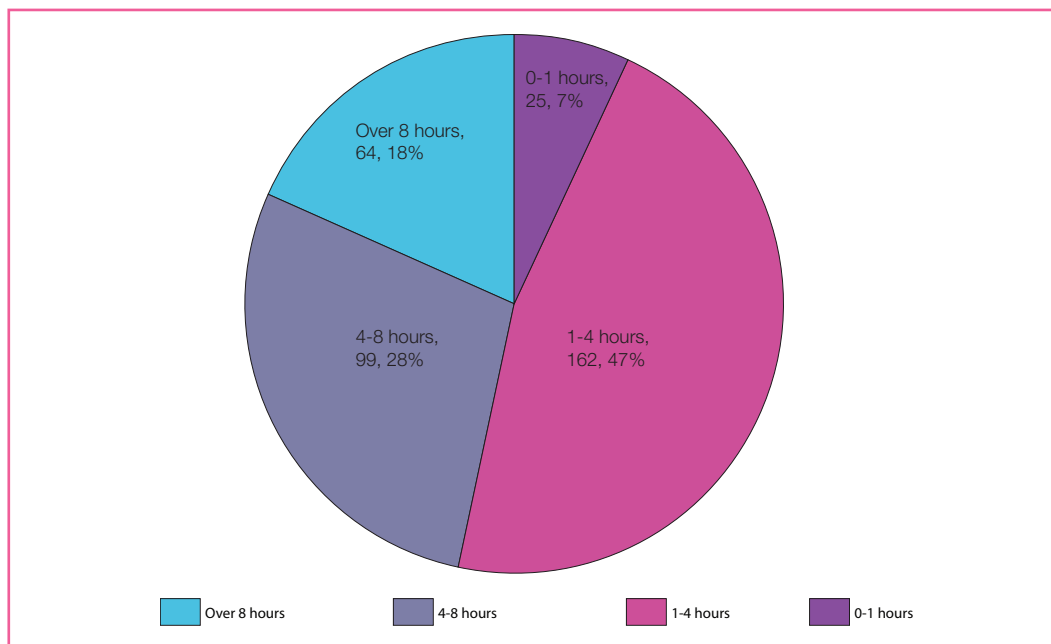


Figure 7 Hours spent supporting students outside class per week (full time teachers only, n = 350)

It's important to add here that managers' time too is significantly occupied in this aspect of further education work.

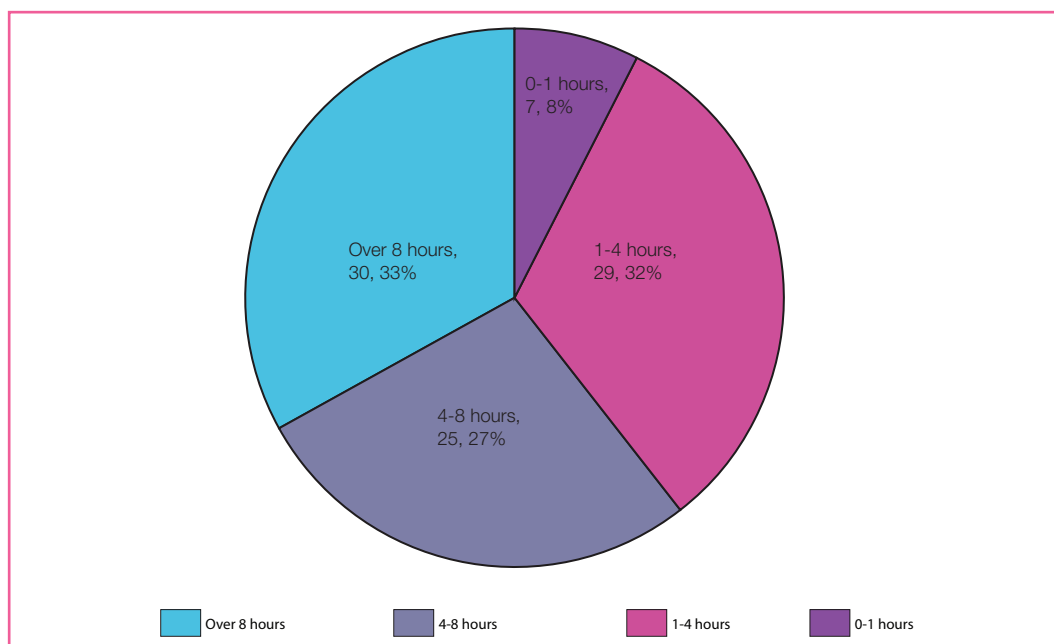


Figure 8 Hours spent supporting students outside class per week (managers, n = 91)

A third of the survey respondents who identified themselves as managers said they spent more than 8 hours per week supporting students outside classroom time. Taken alongside the chart showing teachers' time spent on the same issue, this data suggests the significance of the scaffold of support needed for some students in further education. Many students bring with them very particular needs and support requirements. Sometimes these span across multiple areas. Simple institutional systems and structures are often not adequate in dealing with these. Often, instead, the requirement is that an individual member of staff guides the student through a prolonged process. In some cases, additional support needs continually surface during a student's time in college. These have to be responded to.

This invisible, socially-situated and framing element of further education teachers' work may also by necessity involve restorative work aimed at starting to repair the damage sustained by students to their learning identities in prior educational experiences. The research has uncovered the impact of experiences of social exclusion and labelling that students experienced at school and exposed how the educational system is not a meritocratic system; rather it is a place where intergenerational marginalization and exclusion is encountered. Labelling theory can be linked to teacher expectation and self-fulfilling prophecy (see Ball 1981). Activities by the teacher may lead to learners being labelled as 'intelligent', 'slow' or 'average'.

The study has revealed how transformative teaching and learning facilitates the subversion and rejection of negative labels by students and the re-working of learning identities to gain hope and pathways forward. Dialogic communication between teachers and learners was the key to actively involving students in their own education; this active participation included the co-creation of the curriculum whereby students' needs, motivations and interests were the driving factors. Assessment was often measured by each students' own goals and aspirations and the distance they had travelled in a self-defined learning journey. Offering an egalitarian model involved a consideration of the cultural, psychological and educational factors related to the student. This approach values their history, present and future narratives, rather than fitting all students into one prescriptive framework. It also facilitates the students' own connection with historical, social, economic and political structures that privilege the dominant ideologies. As they gained confidence and were supported on their learning journey within a holistic learning environment, students spoke of how they developed real hope to strive for dreams they had previously not even imagined. Linked to the students' progress was what they described as being involved in shaping what they were taught and reflecting on what they wanted to learn in the future.

In order to build a picture of the different components of transformative teaching and learning, the survey used a series of questions from validated surveys that in our judgement best matched the key features of teachers' work we had identified in the qualitative project data. We judged fostering a sense of belonging, knowing about students' backgrounds, cultivating mutual respect in the classroom and listening to students' problems to be important aspects of this.

As we have already noted, further education teachers' roles are broader than simply 'delivering' subject knowledge. Effective teaching and learning in colleges involves teachers fostering a sense of belonging in the classroom. The survey data provides insights into this element. The extent to which teachers tried to (1) listen and understand students' problems, (2) know about students' backgrounds, (3) feel connected to students and (4) provide emotional support for students when necessary, correlated with each other. These practices are all instances of fostering positive student-teacher relationships. On average, the teachers reported trying to incorporate these practices 'often' or 'always' (the mean score was 4.43, where 4 = often and 5 = always).

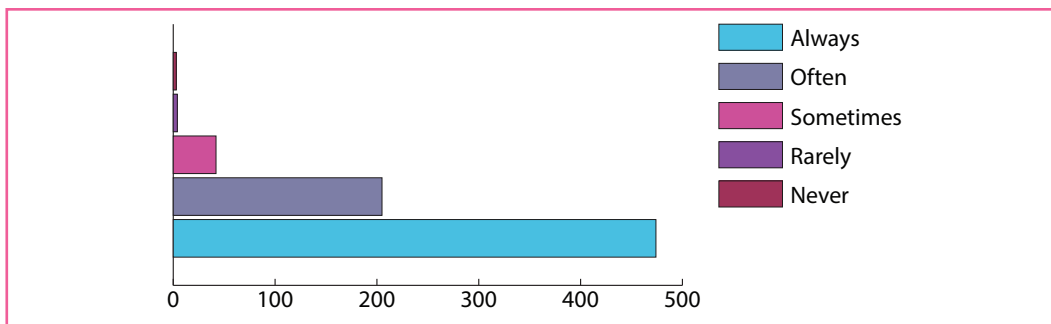


Figure 9 'In my teaching, I try to listen to and understand students' problems.'

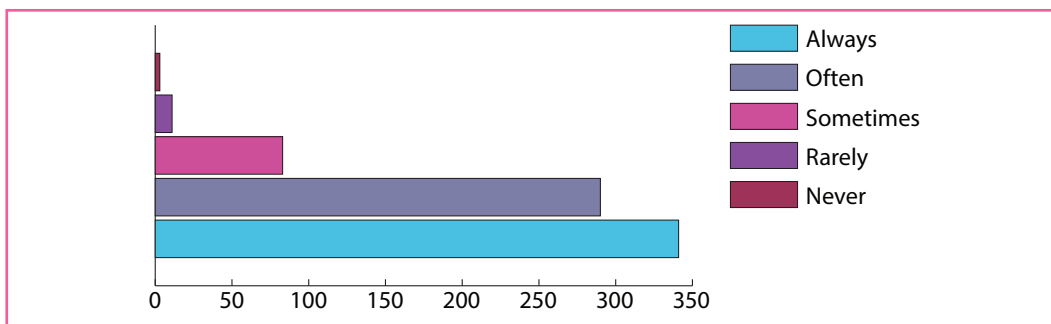


Figure 10 'In my teaching, I try to know my students' backgrounds.'

Responses to questions about the extent to which teachers tried to (1) create a learning environment that fosters mutual respect, (2) encourage students to feel a sense of belonging to the class, (3) ensure that students feel respected and valued, (4) give students space to voice their opinions and (5) encourage positive relationships between peers in the classroom, also correlated with each other. They can all be seen as aspects of fostering a sense of belonging to the class. On average, the teachers reported trying to incorporate these practices almost 'always' (the mean score was 4.75, where 4 = often and 5 = always). Findings are shown below for two example items (number of teachers shown after bars).

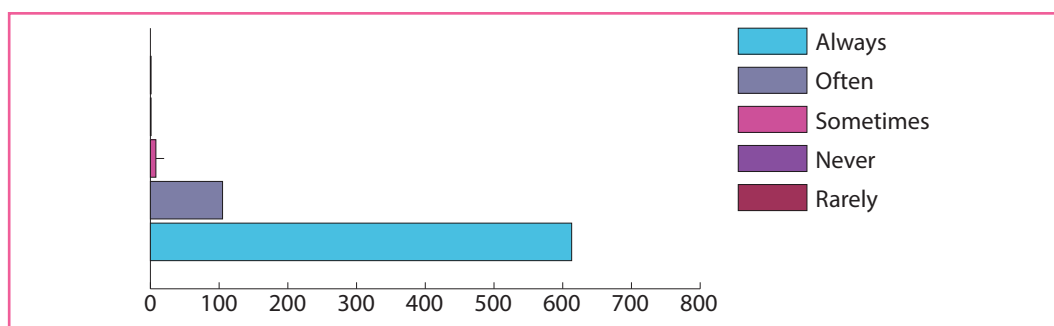


Figure 11 'In my teaching, I try to create a learning environment that fosters mutual respect.'

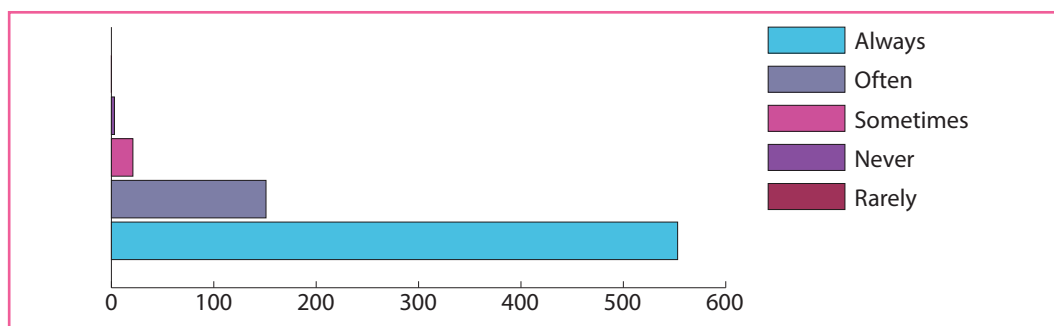


Figure 12 'In my teaching, I try to encourage my students to feel a sense of belonging to the class.'

Interview data from many colleges indicated that teachers felt funding considerations often impacted negatively on their freedom to create the conditions in which transformative teaching and learning can take place. In addition, the survey sought to find out if a funding environment that has been significantly affected by budget cuts as part of government austerity measures has had any impact in this area. Although two thirds of teachers believed that course funding 'always' or 'often' impacted on their freedom to meet their learners' needs and support students to achieve their aspirations, this had no effect on the extent to which they tried to foster positive student-teacher relationships or a sense of belonging in the classroom. While this suggests that restrictions caused by course funding did not influence teachers' attempts to incorporate these positive practices into their teaching, once more, the data signals the importance of an invisible and unmeasured aspect of further education teachers' work.

2. Routes into further education

There are many different routes into further education. This is another aspect that makes it special. Unlike school, entry points are not governed by age or catchment area and house prices. Rather they are rooted in the decisions of individuals. What this means is that further education can be an open door that provides opportunity for people with a range of different purposes. In that sense it is responsive to the agency and action of people from across the social spectrum. The two examples from our data below illustrate very different journeys, having different incidents that instigated a re-engagement with education as a means of bringing about change in each participant's life.

Prior to her Access course, **Abi** felt she had lost her way and, having just escaped from an abusive relationship, wanted to start a new life with her very young child. Taking charge of her life, she decided to move from the south to the north of England. In further education, she found new friends and discovered a passion for a particular subject. From there she followed her new aspirations and went on to study a Social Science degree at Manchester University. In Abi's case, a situation of personal crisis triggered enormous change:

■ *I'd lost all my confidence and didn't know who I was. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I had an interest in Sociology, Psychology and Criminology, so I went down that route. I think I had a real interest in finding out why people were the way they were. Maybe it's because of what I had been through. The people on my (Access to HE) course had all been through some situations in their life that had been challenging.*



Abi from Access to HE to degree in Social Sciences

The further education experience Abi talks about here is more than merely a financial investment. Abi's decision is one that has profound personal consequences. It is made from a position which suggests agency, but, in addition, it is made on the basis that this agency will be enhanced through the experience. The economic aspects of her choice are implicit in Abi's further education rather than being the result of cold calculation. Without the confidence-building and the resurgence of self-belief that she experienced on her access course, Abi's decision might have come to nothing. Importantly, Abi's further education was not just about gaining a qualification. In some ways, the Access to HE qualification is a token or a symbol of re-engagement. What it represents is a social process. Abi talks about sharing an experience with others coming from a similar situation. This aspect of further education is one that policy makers and funding bodies have consistently failed to acknowledge and reward. Abi now describes her life as having been 'transformed'.

Another participant, **Dean**, offered an insight into how a transformative teaching and learning environment could meet an employer's needs while also acting as a catalyst for personal and professional development. In Dean's case, his employer liaised closely with the college to ensure a construction curriculum that was appropriate. But the employer relied absolutely on the expertise and the affirmative approaches adopted by the college teaching staff. For Dean, attending college also meant overcoming the significant barrier of a lack of self-confidence:



■ *Given the opportunity to further myself, that's a no brainer. But then coming to college, that first day, I was like: I'm not sure I can do this.... It's changed me. I can do things. I am capable... The first day I started I had no computer skills... Now I feel like I've got a bit of respect. It's definitely life-changing... Even with the kids, I went to parents' evening... I ended up chatting (to the teacher) more about me than about (my daughter)... I've been promoted to be site manager. It's been an amazing turnaround.*

Dean Apprenticeship

Simon, the managing director of a construction company and Dean's employer talked about the importance of 'growing' his own talent. By this he meant positioning learning at the heart of his company. This involved him in developing a holistic educational experience with a local college that blurred the boundaries between learning spaces and the workplace. The apprenticeship course that Dean was undertaking was dependent on Simon's personal commitment as an employer to his employees. Simon saw construction as a vocation and a career with opportunities for personal growth and the development of skills and knowledge:



■ *I've built a five year course – when people say an apprenticeship, (normally) it's two years. I've been absolutely saddened by the attitude of the industry where it is encouraged and rewarded to collect as many apprentices as you can, massive intake then after two years, you take an eighteen year old and you say: I'm sorry there's no future with us.... The driving force for us is, you pass and do your apprenticeship with us and you are guaranteed a career. That's part of the deal... you work hard for me, you work hard for the business and we will look after you and we will guarantee you a framework.*

Simon

Within Simon's contribution there is an explicit criticism of some other employers' attitudes to the (current) Apprenticeship programme and indeed, evidence is emerging that the new scheme is not fulfilling expectations (Richmond 2018). Simon's non-exploitative approach is distinctive and, in the transformative teaching and learning experiences on offer through his model of apprenticeship, he seeks to connect the success of his company with the personal development of employees. In his case, there is space alongside the learner and the teacher on the 'driving seat' and his is an enabling rather than a dominant role.

In Dean's case, we can see that further education once more is not simply about the individual student making their way. But, just as with Abi, it involves the connected commitment of others; namely, Simon as Dean's employer provided a vital foundation of care and that, along with the expertise, experience and support of Dean's college teachers, helped in the realisation of his story. Huddleston and Laczik (2019: 20) suggest that: 'If employers are to be engaged, then it is suggested that what is expected of them is de-scaled, structured and prioritised in such a way that what they can offer is relevant, realistic and adds value'. Simon's contribution is all of these and this stems from being underpinned by values that connect the needs of his firm to the interests of his employees.

Economic capital, further education and hope

Economic capital is wealth either inherited or generated from interactions between the individual and the economy. Both Abi and Dean's accounts can be viewed through the lens of economic capital. This is not the only lens through which to view their narratives but it does provide an important frame for understanding i) their point of (re)entry into further education, and ii) the impact of this re-entry on their economic circumstances in their emerging futures.

While neither Dean nor Abi spoke about poverty as impacting on their experience of schooling (unlike some participants), for both of them, the financial circumstances of low wage work (for Dean) and parenthood following a relationship breakdown (for Abi) forced a re-think about how they viewed themselves. These circumstances also led them to explore how further education could help them change their economic situation and put themselves and their families on a more secure financial footing. Articulated in a different way, further education opened up a space of hope for them.

For many participants, the notion of 'choice' in terms of trajectories that encompassed education was shaped by previous experience. For example, initially Higher Education as an option was not considered by many of the participants prior to entering college. For many project participants, the prospect of being full time students was inhibiting because they did not have the economic capital. For Abi though, the investment and the 'risk' involved in taking the decision was life-changing requiring determination and a new direction. The emotional and economic capital needed for the participants to make these transitions through education and into the field of work was difficult. Further education provided the time and the space that made a consideration of the transition and a re-imagining of personal futures possible.

3. Restorative education: addressing students' prior educational experiences & psychological needs

Our research identified how important the students' past experiences were in shaping their journeys into further education and beyond. Childhood experiences of being poor, struggling at school and not achieving, being subjected to (physical and symbolic) violence left many students desperate with low self-esteem and low confidence both in childhood and adulthood. For school leavers at 16, further education colleges are where these issues have to be addressed so that learning can (re)commence and potential can be re-energised as teachers strive to support students connect their educational experiences to their lives in meaningful ways.

Adult education can often be a critical space to support and empower learners (and indeed teachers against the dominant discourse) to take agency, no matter what their trajectory so far. As a result of often painful histories, many students had low self-esteem and experienced feelings of failure when they began their adult education courses. For a number of the students, for example **David** and **Jade**, this was exacerbated by the shame they felt because they struggled to read and write. On arrival at college there was a strong feeling that, mirroring their experiences at school, they would be judged and labelled by others. Working as part of a collective with the teacher and their peers was a way for the participants to see themselves differently as individuals, to question their positioning in unbalanced power relationships that have marginalised them, and act to transform their experience. The sharing of ideas and the dialogue between the teacher, participants and other students, led to a sharing of experience which was framed within a social praxis that included reflection and action (Macedo 1994). Being able to be actively involved in decision-making and dialogue for these students meant experiencing a democratic educational environment and culture for the first time. For David and Jade, whose courses took place in community settings, the blurring of informal and formal boundaries allowed for a spill-over of this kind of social interaction outside the classroom. For many of the learners, this inclusive approach to education and community action was the antithesis of what they had experienced previously.

The research sought to explore the qualities of the relationship between the teacher and the student as central to the process of transformative teaching and learning. However, living with the impact of poverty and having minimal dominant social capital to support them to break out of their conditions, can mean learners feel anxious and have a belief they are 'stupid' and 'failures'. The narratives in our study reveal the contradictions, complexities and ambivalences they experienced in their daily lives and how they tried to make sense of them from their structural positioning as learners in a society based on inequality of opportunity and choice. As illustrated by the voices of the participants, the learners had to re-discover agency in the learning process provided by further education to enable them to catalyse their agency and harness educational qualification to an imagined future.

The challenge for teachers and policy makers is therefore to establish the conditions in which learners are empowered to take agency within the field of education. This has implications for curriculum and for funding. The curriculum needs to connect at an important level with learners' lives and experiences. The funding has to support small step progression. Some learners from our project have been facilitated by colleges to take a series of small steps and achievements leading to full engagement with a mainstream qualification. We will now illustrate the immanent power of further education to undo the damage done by schooling and / or limited and low-paid employment prospects drawing on data from conversations with two of the project participants.

Claire found in her Access to HE course a new world in which for the first time she was listened to and was able also to find her own voice. This led to her positioning herself differently in a world she could see from a fresh perspective. This change in her view of herself in relation to the world was integral to success as a learner. For Claire, further education was strongly positioned as a setting where people could acquire an awareness of the structural inequality in society and their struggle within that (Freire 1995). This awareness provided Claire with the opportunity to challenge the hegemony she had experienced and rupture the flow of it in the private domain of her family. Claire went on to complete her course and ultimately, became a teacher in the same college where she first began her re-engagement with education. This enabled her to realise for others the transformative teaching and learning experiences that had helped her change her life.

Claire provided a range of evidence about the different conditions that work together as constituent parts of transformative teaching and learning environments. One key aspect of a learning environment of this kind is the way in which the curriculum relates to the learners' biographies. For Claire, this was as simple as being accepted for who she was:

- *My self-esteem and confidence wasn't what it was when I was eighteen. (Now) I'm comfortable in my own skin. And that's something to do with equality. And people at Northern College accepting you for you... And just that right to speak without being interrupted. I found that, like, so powerful. And being really listened to as well.*

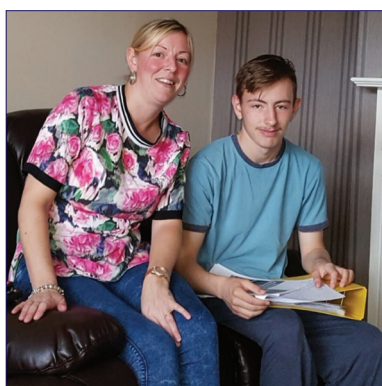


Claire from Access to HE student to Access to HE teacher

Here, Claire describes the power she experienced in simply being listened to and how she longed to return to the classroom in order to experience that empowerment once more. This research illustrates how teachers and researchers and research participants can collaborate to create alternatives for encouraging self-expression and discovery in education. Our vision of education is that more attention needs to be given to marginalised individuals and populations in the context of curricular innovations that both enhance and promote literacy development and personal self-esteem. Claire's account illustrates another important attribute of transformative teaching and learning environments. Central in this was the sense that participants had of not being 'judged' and of being accepted for 'who you are'. This is explained in a number of cases by prior educational experiences that featured labelling and being designated 'thick' or as coming from a particular family or estate. In contrast, learning environments which enable transformative learning to take place are founded on an ethos of egalitarianism – usually explicitly. People's background, thoughts and views are accepted and even foregrounded as important features in the curriculum and as a basis from which to move forward.

Participants' accounts revealed further education courses as pathways to overcoming problematic and painful domestic issues; for example, abusive relationships, alcohol dependency and mental health issues. Empowerment was also linked to agency. The participants described how the telling of the narrative was empowering in the classroom; their narrative was a capital for resistance against the barriers they had faced. They described having their eyes opened to 'a whole new world' by returning to education and improving their confidence and skills.

The research uncovered many examples of labelling: cases in which participants felt that they were labelled by teachers and that this had a very negative impact on their experience of schooling. The symbolic violence that the learners had experienced was often hidden because it triggered feelings of shame in the individual. **Adam** provided a powerful representative example of this. Adam was a sixteen year old who had been excluded from his local school. He explained how one reason for this was that he had anger management problems:



Adam and his mum

■ *In school I was getting angry quite a lot. I was punching walls... I used to think I was dumb all the time in school. I had no hopes at all...*

The knock-on effects for Adam's family and home life were significant. His mother described how she received phone calls every day and sometimes had to leave work in order to pick her son up early from school. Adam's sense of being 'dumb' and ignored was, in his mind, connected to teachers' labelling him as coming from a particular estate with a 'reputation': this created negative expectations that meant his identity as a learner was severely compromised:

■ *I was in a lesson and I was there with my hand up asking for help and there was another person with their hand up asking for help. I'm the naughty one and he was a good lad... So (the teacher) went straight to him and then another person put their hand up and then another person even though I had my hand up. And he kept going round and round until after nine people then he come to me. And that was why I was getting angry... Everyone just looks at you and they think Oh yeah... They judge a book by its cover and you shouldn't do that.*

In Adam's story, symbolic violence is observed as an outcome of the way the teacher relates to and interacts with the learner. As with another participant, Anita – who talked about being put 'in a box', symbolic violence takes the form of an ongoing assessment of 'ability' that shapes social interactions between teacher and learner. The educational relationship is characterised by a teacher's judgemental position and regard towards the student.

For Adam, entering a further education college at 15 meant re-discovering that he could be successful as a learner. His interest in football was encouraged and he had plans and ambitions to coach as a result. The pressures at home vanished: on the first parents' evening, his mother sat and listened to an account of his progress for five minutes before asking: *Are you sure you've got the right Adam?*

This was because she had become habituated to receiving calls at work from Adam's school asking her to come and take him home because of another outburst of temper. Finding success as a learner in college meant that the life of Adam's family was transformed, not just his. From viewing himself as a failure who was unable to learn, Adam was helped to rediscover self-belief and hope:

■ *My mum, my nan, my dad and my grandad are all proud of me. I've come here and they've seen the changes in me. The smile on my mum's face when she came back from Parents' Evening was amazing. My dad said, "I'm proud of you son."*

This view was not uncommon amongst project participants who described how uplifting it was for someone to value them for who they were and recognise the obstacles they had overcome. Along with this recognition came validation. The learners described how this empowered them and gave them a feeling of self-worth, inspiring them with confidence, a view onto the future and hope.

Cultural Capital (Practices, knowledge and skills)

Speaking about their experience of school, many participants spoke of being 'ignored' and 'invisible' in the classroom. They were often positioned as deficit as they did not have the dominant capital. While home and family life may appear to be neutral, through symbolic representation, the cultural capital a middle class child brings from home (e.g. a knowledge of books or experience of going to the theatre) makes a vital contribution to them achieving success in the accruing of qualifications. This can be seen as 'natural' rather than the result of them mobilising this 'inherited' cultural capital. The symbolic power embedded within legitimised cultural capital can lead to familial advantage and the differential access it gives to educational achievement being misrecognised in terms of individual natural ability and effort. Viewing what is 'natural' in cultural terms has the potential to recast the perceived 'failings' of individuals in terms of an unequal distribution of inherited cultural capital among the social classes.

If a student feels, as many of the students in this project did, that they do not fit in at school, that their social and cultural practices are inappropriate and that their tacit knowledge is undervalued, they may feel vulnerable and be more inclined to withdraw themselves as active participants in learning. We would argue that schooling can in some instances be positioned as fulfilling a political agenda of providing an education to working class people which reproduces existing social relations of educational inequality. The marketization of schools (including academisation and the establishment of so-called 'free schools'), appears to consolidate this effect. Despite a pervasive instrumentalist policy view of further education colleges that seems *prima facie* to 'class' college students, the project data provides a body of evidence that shows how further education can reverse the stunting of individual educational potential that is the unfortunate effect of some experiences of schooling. The empowerment project participants regained by accessing further education was linked to the renewed dignity and self-belief it afforded them.

4. Diversity and further education

In this report there is a recognition of the power of further education to challenge rather than reproduce social inequality. Indeed, this report identifies that while adults have differentiated, 'divided and divisive' access to education, further education colleges offer a critical space in which individuals, their families and communities can challenge such inequality. The research offers a frame for understanding learners' stories of educational and personal transition to and through further education colleges and beyond. It illuminates the transformative teaching and support carried out by teachers in and out of the classroom, day in and out, against what we describe as the 'triple lock' (Duckworth and Smith, 2018A) of objectification. In addition it offers a platform to demonstrate the power of employers to work with further education colleges to develop transformational and socially situated curricula. The research also illustrated a number of transitions from further education.

One way learning in colleges differs from the educational experience offered in schools is that colleges are more likely to recruit from a diverse population of students. A well-established effect of the housing market in the UK is the way it tends to promote the consolidation of residential areas that are ethnically and socio-economically homogeneous (Glynn 2005). In addition, the phenomenon of 'white flight' means that some of our 'inner city' areas and particular districts within towns predominantly house ethnic minority communities. Whether because of the impact of marketization or local authority housing policies, newly arrived ethnic groups often find themselves placed in already densely populated areas that are sometimes characterised by poor housing stock (Daley 1998). For one research participant, Chaima, this meant that her experience of primary and secondary education in Oldham was in schools that were 90%+ Bengali background children. For **Chaima**, it was only when she attended college that she got to socialise and make friends with young people from other ethnic groups.



Chaima college meant meeting people from different backgrounds

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

Entering further education, Chaima rediscovered her learning identity with the support of teachers who believed in her. She worked steadily until she gained entry to Higher Education. Further education provided a space where she met people from other walks of life and, for her very importantly, learnt about cultures outside that of the Bangladeshi community; she formed friends that enriched her life.

■ *When I came into college, it was very diverse. I had people in my class that were white, I had people in my class that were black, people in my class that were Chinese... It was nice to be inside that classroom... A lot of them are still my friends to this day. I learnt about them and their community and they learnt about me and my community as well... It eliminates that ignorance.*

Our study illustrated that students' histories, while always social, merit closer attention to the details that contribute to significant differences in their ways of being and the choices / or lack of choices they have. Access or lack of access to different capitals (social, economic, cultural) can empower or disempower students. Students may feel rooted in their geographical communities and this may tie them to a particular positioning in social space (Bourdieu 1994). The discourse around social mobility is interesting here as its apparent focus on the individual escaping an area / social class background / pathologised family or culture suggests that the rejection and abandonment of one's provenance is a positive benefit of education. This is a perspective that we would seek to counter. The project participants described the difficulties they encountered when trying to move outside their familiar space, and for many that included walking through the doors of the local college. But once they had crossed the threshold, further education colleges offered them opportunities to review themselves as learners and negotiate an educational route that could improve their lives. This wasn't then, about the abandonment of origin that is implicit in much of the discourse about social mobility. Instead, the transformative teaching and learning that participants reported had positive spill-over effects into the homes and communities that they came from.

In 1992, **Awor** arrived in the UK as a teenager from South Sudan. With no English she struggled to find her way and establish her independence. Things changed when she began studying ESOL at a local college in Birmingham. From there she went on to complete an NVQ in Health and Social Care. Now, twenty years later, she is studying for a Degree in Nursing. Her daughter has just finished a degree in Accountancy and Finance and now works in the legal sector. Awor's determination to overcome multiple obstructions in her health and personal circumstances expressed itself in a cycle of further education over more than a twenty year period. This enabled her to gain employment first in care but then to facilitate the realisation of her dreams and ambitions to become a nurse.



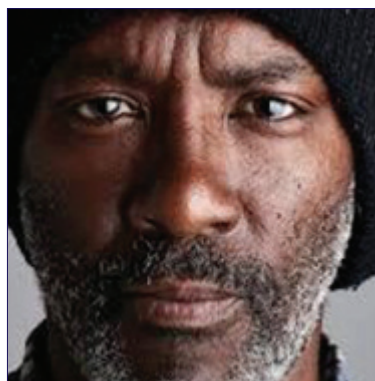
Awor college enabled me to gain qualifications at my own pace

Awor's story illustrates how further education can act as a space that facilitates social cohesion in assisting refugees and others to establish themselves in their new lives in this country. Her story illustrates the abundance of aspiration that further education taps into and that can help people in the realisation of their hopes. For Awor, college gave her opportunities to improve her standard of living and provide a secure home life for herself and her daughter.

Temporality is an important ingredient in the further education offer. For Awor, this meant returning to learn as a young adult but our findings reveal that further education operates outside the rigid mapping of age-based assessment that has come to characterise schooling in this country. Another way of seeing this is to recognise that colleges cater for people whose needs are not met by this kind of rigidity. With colleges taking on the majority of young people in the 16-18 age group as well as adults like Awor who want to study vocational courses to improve their income, our policy makers need to acknowledge the value of this flexible provision and fund it proportionately.

Herbert's story provides another example of how further education can offer people the chance to shape their own lives and pursue a fulfilling career. Herbert told us about his experience of dyslexia and how further education played a role in helping him realise his talents first as a bricklayer and then, as a photographer. As a member of the generation about whom Bernard Coard's seminal text *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System* (Coard 1971) was written, Herbert's experience at school followed a worryingly typical pattern.

■ *I didn't really learn much at school. I had two CSEs. They treated me okay. Some didn't treat me that well because I was a difficult child. Not difficult due to playing up or being violent but difficult through learning and that was because of my dyslexia – which I didn't know about then... I think if you are an artist, school doesn't give you the options to explore yourself. When I left school I couldn't really read that well. It makes you think like you're nothing really.*



Herbert went on to do a bricklaying course and to become a builder. While this made him a living, he cherished the idea of becoming a photographer. This was a dream he realised through returning to college.

Herbert when you're at college you feel: this is for me

■ *When you're at school it feels like it's for the government. Whereas, when you're at college you feel: this is for me, it's my livelihood. It's going to be my future... (My college tutor), she was a brilliant woman; she had time for life, for people. It was her. It was really her. She saw dyslexic people as having a gift. So when I went to university I was grateful for being dyslexic, because dyslexic people have a creative mind and that comes through in my photographs.*

What is striking in Herbert's interview is the weight he attaches to his tutor's view of him. A clear marker in the learning experience within this account is the moment at which the teacher helps Herbert transform the dyslexic label into a positive attribute rather than a deficit. The strength that Herbert draws from this he still carries with him today, years later.

The project participants' stories in this section challenge commonly held notions of our society as being meritocratic, a society in which everyone is on an equal footing in the domain of education. We would argue that the research illuminates the relevance of class, gender and ethnicity in shaping the students' journeys. This is something that has continued importance in the era of individualising modernity (Beck 1992). Moreover, these accounts illustrate how important further education colleges are in bringing together people from different ethnic backgrounds in a socially cohesive way. In these accounts, further education is seen to be acting as an equalising force in many ways. It provides different routes for individuals to achieve their ambitions, sometimes despite their negative experience of schooling.

5. Further education, leadership and localism

As we have suggested, incorporation marked a key moment in the evolution of further education structures and cultures in the UK. Among other things, incorporation encouraged principals to view themselves as Chief Executive Officers (CEOs). With much more decision-making power in relation to strategic direction but also in determining the contracts of staff, senior leadership and management have a powerful impact on the social conditions in which teachers work. This means that college leadership can have a powerful influence on the extent to which colleges are an environment that is conducive to transformative teaching and learning. The staff survey touched on this when it asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they perceived leadership within the college allow them to realise different aspects of their role. Findings are shown below each item.

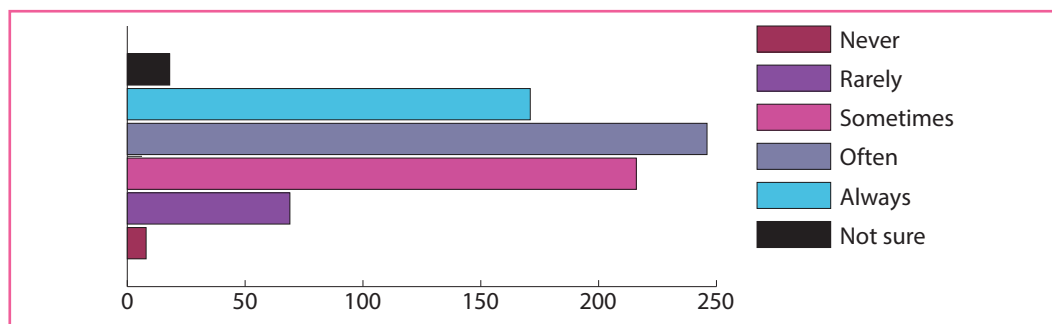


Figure 13 'To what extent does leadership within the college allow you to meet your learners' needs?'

As Figure 13 shows, a significant proportion of survey respondents saw college leadership as enabling them to meet learners' needs. This is leadership impacting at the classroom level facilitating the agency of teachers who are best placed to know and understand students' needs in order to meet them. That said, 40% thought that leadership only sometimes, rarely or never allowed them to meet students' needs. Survey data revealed that those who believed that leadership allowed them to support their students in these ways were more likely to self-report attempting to foster positive student-teacher relationships and a sense of belonging in the classroom.

A further question was forward-looking, focusing on the role of college teachers in facilitating the mapping students' progression routes.

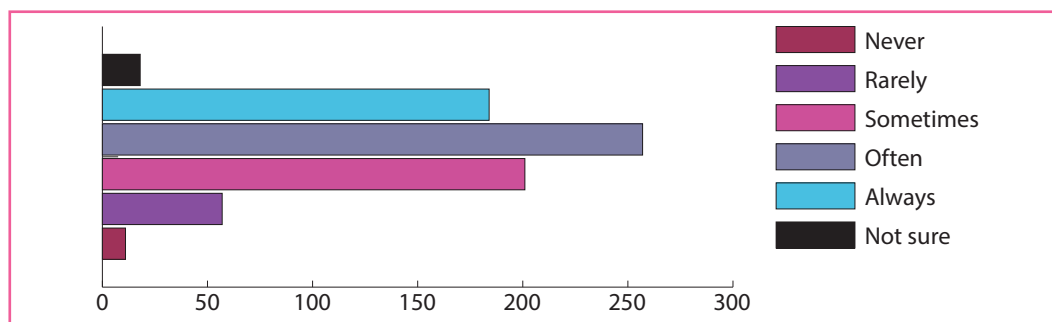


Figure 14 'To what extent does leadership within the college allow you to support students to achieve their aspirations?'

Responses to this question were varied. Over half of the sample of teachers believed that leadership did allow them to deliver these aspects of their role, 'often' or 'always'. Once more though, more than 35% believed that leadership allowed them to support students in achieving their aspirations only sometimes, rarely or never. The extent to which teachers held these beliefs affected the degree to which they attempted to foster positive student-teacher relationships and a sense of belonging in the classroom. Those who believed that leadership allowed them to support their students in these ways were more likely to self-report attempting to include these positive teaching practices.

Leadership can also connect strongly with the local and regional identity of colleges. Our research foregrounded this localism as a key aspect of the distinctiveness of the educational experiences offered by further education colleges.

In an age of neo-liberalism and globalisation, the Freirean concept of transformation (see Freire 1995), based on the premise that by overcoming oppression, oppressed people will move themselves *and their oppressors* towards true humanity, is attractive but may be problematic. Transformation and empowerment of both learners and teachers may be possible but if it is individually focused rather than community orientated, it may lead to a failure to engage in a broader commitment to social justice and liberation. In our study we think it is important to avoid universalist claims and instead to place the narratives from this study in their own political, economic and historical context.

According to the evidence from this project, further (and following that, higher) education turns the deficit, negative self-worth and low self-esteem of these learners into a positive: enhancing these learners' social integration, social mobility and agency with consequent knock-on effects for their families and communities. But as a starting point, we think it is crucial that rather than viewing further education as a 'sector', the basic units that provide the foundation for these transformative effects are local colleges. For that reason, we prefer to talk about *further education* and *further education* colleges as those phrases contain within them an expression of the diversity and context-bound nature of what they signify. The 'FE sector' on the other hand is a policy-makers' fiction: a shorthand that allows for blanket policy-making and all the unforeseen and unnecessary effects that results in.

Further education colleges are deeply rooted in the towns and cities in which they are situated and are well-positioned to connect with local employers in order to facilitate students' transitions into appropriate employment and / or further study. This localism seems to us to be an important overlooked feature of what colleges do and where they are positioned educationally. The notion of the 'FE sector' plays a (negative) part in this. The 'FE sector' is a rhetorical tool that supports the neoliberal instrumentalisation of further education. The 'FE sector' is what Lefebvre (1991) calls an 'abstract space'. This space is conjured up as 'an impersonal pseudo-subject' which conceals 'state (political) power' and in it 'lived experience is crushed' and 'vanquished' (Lefebvre 1991: 49–51). This abstract term invokes a picture of uniformity that makes it acceptable to impose generalised, decontextualised meanings on the very heterogeneous conditions that colleges mediate in towns and cities across the country.

The abstract space of the 'FE sector' is made 'real' through the production and use of 'big (performance) data' and the feeding of this into the policy-making cycle. The requirement for colleges to quantify teaching and learning for funding purposes is part of this. This bureaucratic work enables government and funders to view transformative social processes in numerical forms (see O'Leary and Smith 2012; Smith and O'Leary 2013). This is the abstract space in which the kind of transformative teaching and learning that we have illustrated in the data is conceptually reduced to a technical 'delivery' process or a spoon-feeding/transmission approach to education. Through abstraction, the complex socially interactive process that makes up teaching and learning in all its richness is reduced to numbers on a spreadsheet or worse still, a commodified set of qualification 'products'.

The evidence from our research counterposes this bleak and dehumanising abstraction with a different kind of space. Drawing once more from Lefebvre, we see within transformative teaching and learning echoes of what Lefebvre calls 'differential space'. He sees this as existing as potential within abstract space like a seed of its opposite:

■ *I shall call that new space 'differential space', because, inasmuch as abstract space tends towards homogeneity, towards the elimination of existing differences or peculiarities, a new space cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences. (1991: 52)*

If the abstract space of the 'FE sector' sees teaching and learning as corresponding to the transmission of knowledge, a local space that is resistant to the external view of further education as being about students acquiring skills for the national economy as though they were tiny cogs in a colossal mechanism. Differential space is the antithesis of abstract space and is a space in which critical pedagogy is espoused. This is an approach to teaching and learning that originates in Freirean pedagogy (Freire 1995) and views students in a holistic way, as coming from somewhere, as reflexive and dialogical co-constructors of meaning and as people with biographies and an existing history as learners. It views teaching successfully in further education as balancing a critical understanding of locality and the national policy context in which it takes place.

A perspective on the local needs that colleges are meeting informed many of the teachers' contributions in the data. This responsiveness to localised needs and circumstances is another unrecognised contribution of further education colleges. This localism had an important socio-economic dimension in many instances. For many college teachers, this role connected strongly with dealing with the effects of austerity. For example, in the North West, some colleges have taken to providing free breakfasts for their students in recognition of the fact that many students were arriving at college not ready to learn because levels of household poverty were so high. A similar localised strategy that broadens the role of further education and makes it about more than 'delivering' qualifications involved providing uniforms for young people on one course that included a placement with external employers. This strategy came about in response to teachers noticing that a significant number of students had only one set of clothes.

In other cases, colleges' localised disposition was an embedded aspect of their rootedness in the history of the region. Judith's practice as a teacher was rooted in her own history and subsequent deep understanding of the North East (see p26). The narratives of participants in this area of the country all carried a historical subtext dating back to the Miners' Strike of the early 1980s. The mining villages surrounding Durham were severely affected by the pit closures that happened in the wake of the dispute. Many villages often depended on the mines as the main employers in the area. Consequently, pit closures resulted in mass unemployment and impacted massively on future job prospects. As identified by Hoffman *et al* (2019) an understudied but critical aspect of finding a career is the quotient of social and cultural capital of the job seeker. The college drew its demographic from surrounding (ex) pit villages and Judith was cognisant of that fact:

■ *We have to break the cycle of low aspirations in the north east because we've got whole generations now who don't work...*

Judith's understanding of her role is deeply rooted in the location of the college and in the communities the college serves. In this case, her role involves addressing the legacy of the industrial strategies of 1980s Thatcherism when the largescale industries of motor manufacture, coal and steel production had public subsidies withdrawn. This resulted in towns and villages in the North East losing huge numbers of jobs. Some villages were entirely reliant on coal for employment.

The finding that colleges are going beyond funded provision in order to meet local student need is also a strong theme in the account of **Jacqui**, a senior leader in a West Midlands college. In her contribution, Jacqui outlined how the college had for a number of years provided community outreach specifically to target and recruit 'vulnerable' and 'disaffected' young people. Some of this provision was sports-focused and the idea driving it was that if these young people could be re-engaged through an attractive entry level course, that might then lead to them enrolling on other college courses. But there was a bigger motivation and that was connected to notions of the college as having a role in addressing issues of social deprivation and championing social justice and social cohesion.

■ *Our service... it's half social work and half teaching. I mean who would pick up the pieces if we weren't here...? Without us here? Mental health is massive, it's getting bigger. Social work. We find students places to live. We do all that wraparound service as well... (Colleges) tend to be community hubs. Take Handsworth for instance... people go there, we put on community events. It's a part of the community. I go back to mental health and loneliness – these are serious and growing things and further education is one of the only places that anybody can access, where people can interact and improve themselves. Without FE, where do people without qualifications go?*



Jacqui Senior leader

Jacqui's contributions are full of stories about young people who, through further education, have found their way in life. She talks about her experiences of working with gang members in Birmingham. The excerpt above presents the role of the college as much more than simply purveying courses to provide skills for employment. The 'wraparound' services offered by the college appear to be plugging gaps left by the withdrawal of public funding for services like youth and community work. Jacqui sees this as a vital role. This 'sense of place' and the commitment to the communities the college has historically served is, like the pastoral work provided by teaching staff, 'under the radar' – not acknowledged by funders or government or, at best, viewed as an add-on. Jacqui argues services are fundamental and positions the college as a hub that provides social cohesion and a range of

other social benefits. She goes on to highlight how these wraparound services are under threat due to funding cuts:

- *What they have done is cut our funding and our ability now to go out and run taster programmes for those we can get off the streets... who there's a good chance they're not going to stay longer than a couple of weeks. But if you could get them and give them a try and if that doesn't work they could try something else... Just give them that space of ten weeks. We used to get European funding for it and government funding... I've put classes on in community centres in their areas... we've done all of that extra work... but the cuts mean it's less and less. Cutting the funding now, all you're doing: what it's going to cost in national health and health and social care!*

The first part of this passage depicts the college as undertaking outreach work in areas within the city and for young people who are at risk of becoming so-called NEET. Once more a sense of commitment, a residual civic duty motivates the College to lay on taster courses as a way of re-engaging young people who have lost any sense that education can connect meaningfully with their lives. Crucially, there is a recognition that the College's work in this is preventative of social problems and costs in the future. The funding methodology focus on the 'here and now' is found wanting from this perspective. Further education is a vital resource for these transformative journeys. Indeed as social and economic inequities increase between and within countries there is a need to take action. Policies designed to improve literacy and to enhance opportunities for transformative learning need to be tightly bound to challenging poverty.

Jacqui's account positions further education as an avenue through which learners can gain access to social capital. This involves them building new relationships with their peers that allow them to develop their confidence and reposition themselves through routes into education and employment that may have previously fallen outside their world picture. The research has revealed the importance of social capital in supporting the students into education and on their trajectory.

Many of the students voiced how they had felt isolated in their communities. The friends they made at college and on their trajectory became their support mechanism. Social capital was a resource which was accumulated through the relationships formed across the field of education. It offered many of the students a lasting support mechanism. The students empowered themselves to navigate through difficult circumstances which included addictions, violence and trauma and severe austerity, through the bonds of friendship formed in the classroom. For some of the students in Jacqui's account, the social capital provided by the College filled a vacuum that would otherwise have been filled by external affiliations and gang membership.

6. Parenthood, challenging intergenerational poverty and the 'ripple effect'

Research from across the world has identified how family background influences young people's educational trajectories (see for example Buchmann and Diprete 2006). Working-class parents just like middle-class parents desire to help their children, but may lack the social and cultural resources to become involved in a way that will influence their children's educational pathways. This longitudinal study has gathered rich data comprising the narratives of learners, teachers, family members and employers and others. This has enabled us to build up a vital evidence base to draw on and inform detailed analysis of the impact of further education and to explore its impact in challenging cycles of intergenerational inequality and contributing to the achievement of social justice with its powerful individual, social, economic and health benefits.

A key theme that emerged from the study is the notion of the 'ripple effect' of transformative teaching and learning. In a sector of education that is dominated and governed by complex student metrics (mainly focused on so called 'success rates': retention X achievement) linked to funding (see for example Smith 2015; Smith and O'Leary 2013), the notion of the ripple effect is a *countermetric*. The ripple effect can be seen as an unmeasured and therefore widely unrecognised social benefit that falls outside a neoliberal purview but nevertheless has a significant positive economic impact beyond the achievement of a qualification by a single individual.

Addressing the impact of intergenerational poverty is obviously more important in areas where there is poverty. Our research shows that further education colleges provide a significant safety net for students from backgrounds affected by poverty. In effect, colleges are picking up the detrimental social effects of recent government policy on public expenditure. College teachers are having to address issues associated with this newly acquired role on a day to day basis. Poverty and its effects reach right inside further education classrooms and impact on students' ability to learn. Any discussion about education being a key to social mobility needs to take account of how some parts of our education system shoulder the burden of addressing issues associated with poverty more than others. We would suggest that colleges, whose demographic includes young people and adults coming from backgrounds such as these, should be funded appropriately. We will now present three accounts to illustrate the power of this 'ripple effect'.

Jade is a young mother who attends adult literacy classes run by a local charitable trust in the north west of England. Being a mum motivates her and she has seen her confidence increase while studying and has learnt new literacies. Now, she has aspirations for her future and is determined to be the best possible role model for her son.

- *It gives me confidence. It makes me feel better. It makes me feel more like I can go and get what I need to achieve and... be who I want to be. I just want to be like... someone with a job. Have money. I want to be able to treat my son. I used to get holidays when I was younger and it was exciting and I want to be able to treat my son to stuff like that. At the moment I can't really do that and it's making me feel like I can do it. I can do it.... I want to give him the best childhood that he could have and that's by me doing what I want to do as well... I've been through times of depression but I've always tried to stay positive... I've been at the lowest place in life... My son brought me out of it. Children look up to their parents and I want him to look up to me... It's for my son. It's all about him really. What he's had in his life up to now is crap. He deserves a lot more. Kids are innocent and pure and they are the way they are taught...*

This passage illustrates the centrality of motherhood as a motivational force for Jade as an adult learner. Rather than a focus on the production of a neoliberal vision of human economic potential signified by human capital, Jade's literacy classes engage with her existing emotional capital (see Reay 1998, 2000) as a way of opening up possibilities for educational success. Emotional capital includes the need to be a good mother and provide educational care (O'Brien 2007) such as the support offered to Jade and Anita by their teachers. In Jade's case, it also extended to her circle of friends. Jade was determined to introduce one friend (with experience of mental health issues and also a mother) to the literacy classes as a way of helping her out of a cycle of depression and deprivation:



Jade mother and literacy learner

- *I'm always saying to people... Like my friend, she's had her kids took off her, and she's suicidal, I don't like seeing her like that – it breaks my heart, looking at her. I try and help her as much as I can and get her on the parenting course or the literacy course. Just to get her to stop thinking. Or to get her mind onto something else. I'm always speaking about courses that my friend could go on because she's just so low and I think she deserves a lot more than she's ever had in her life – to build up a bit more, because she thinks very lowly of herself.*

Jade expressed a sense of being comfortable, feeling welcomed and belonging in her literacy classes. The educational space here was transformative in the way it sought to connect her current aspirations for herself and her son with a future lifecourse trajectory. Reay (1998, 2000) suggests that an investment of emotional energy in education by working class mothers depletes their own emotional well-being. However, in Jade and Anita's cases, rather than depletion, we see invigoration: motherhood seems to have acted as a catalyst to the women accessing education and then harnessing educational experience to a future trajectory in life and work, and in helping their children to succeed.



David

David, a participant from an English traveller background, stopped attending school regularly at eight years of age and instead worked with his father. David spoke about his motivations for learning as being able to read to his four year old daughter. He began attending literacy classes in Rochdale and spoke about how being unable to read and write made it difficult to navigate through everyday social encounters:

- *When you can't read and write out there, it's really hard. And it's scary. Now I can actually read and write and sign my own name. When I go to the doctor I can sign a note... You need education to learn about everything that's going on outside.*

What's striking about the passage is David's use of the word 'scary'. This stemmed not just from an inability to decipher a given text but the uncertainty that comes from not knowing when you might next be called on to do so. David's reasons for not being able to read and write originated in his childhood:

- *I had a bit of a bad childhood... I didn't really have help while I was at school. I'm an English gypsy so I was raised in a travelling family. So it was quite hard. I never went to school, I went to work instead. There's a lot of people in the travelling community, mostly with the boys they don't read and write, a lot of them don't. It's normally down to the women to do that kind of thing, the reading and writing of letters and things. Like the gas and the electric bills and all that: They normally sort all that out. The men normally go to work. (At) about eight I went to work. Started working with my dad, till I was about fifteen or sixteen.*

In this example, David's motivation to improve his literacy skills is in effect a way of ensuring his children have more choices than he had. Transformative teaching and learning in David's case is about breaking intergenerational patterns of poverty through education. David stressed how learning to read would enable him to get his driving licence. This clearly connected in his mind to being able to work. But the primary motivation David had for learning was connected to his role as a father: he wanted to be able to read bed-time stories to his four-year-old daughter:

■ *I've got a bit more confidence, I never had much confidence. I couldn't read at all. Now I've started picking up words. It feels great. My little girl, she used to read stories to me and I couldn't read stories back to her. But now I can actually read back. It feels brilliant. It's only from coming here that I've got that... You can do these things, you've just got to want to do it.*

For David then, an effective way in tackling his literacy issue was to focus on habitual practices with a finite number of texts, so that these could be revisited in a safe environment. Bedtimes stories offered him the perfect opportunity. Children have favourite stories and enjoy hearing them repeatedly. Claiming literacy for himself was also a catalyst for David to take part in democratic processes.

■ *I never voted in my life ever. I sat down and read the thing that came through the letterbox and I thought yeah I'll give that a go. And I voted for the first time. I'd never ever voted before and you need to vote. Everyone needs to vote. Now I can actually read and write and sign my own name. When I go to the doctor, I can sign a note... You need education to know what's going on outside: the politics and all that. I'd never voted in my life, ever. I read the thing that came through the letterbox and I voted for the first time.*

While David had moved away from his traveller background, the impact of participation in adult learning has clearly had a multi-faceted impact on him in the community that he and his family are now a part of. Not only has his further education given him confidence in a range of everyday social situations, crucially, it has also given him entry into our democratic practices.

Anita, a female participant from the North East of England, shared a journey that saw her moving away from 'dead-end jobs' towards a career with significant organisational and administrative responsibility and challenging literacy demands. The affirmation of her tutors and the bridging of strong bonds of care they established helped her to 'thrive' and led to a realisation of her aspirations with regards to having fulfilling employment. This, in turn, has impacted on her children's aspirations and educational progress catalysing a transformation in the dynamics of her family. Anita also described how she supported other people from her village with a similar, negative experience of schooling to return to college. The initial barrier that adult education helped Anita to overcome was the constriction of the label of being 'thick' / dyslexic that marked her out at school as a failure according to the dominant model of 'autonomous' literacy (see Street 1990). Once this constriction had been tackled, the rebirth of hope and the construction of a new, positive learning identity leading to a material change in Anita's social positioning inside her family, her community and then in society more widely took place.

Anita provides an example of someone who was regarded as a failure at school, in this case because of undiagnosed dyslexia:

■ *I've always been told I was thick. Always been told I was stupid... The teachers at school assumed I was born to fail. Dyslexia... had (only) just been identified. So you were thick, you were stupid and if your parents didn't even have any faith in you, you're not going to have any faith in yourself.*



Anita

Anita describes how her dyslexia was not addressed at school. In child and adulthood, she felt stigmatised and struggled with being dyslexic. However, she gradually accumulated a body of experience in her working life that signalled administrative, organisational and interpersonal abilities. Encouragement by her partner and a chance opportunity to stand in as a project manager led to her resuming her education. Anita's tutors were key in building on this.

- *In eighteen months, I'll be a qualified social worker. My tutors are the ones that got me here... They encouraged me. They never once doubted me. They made me grow... They are the first people, apart from my partner who ever had any faith in me.*

Her story shows us how further education can offer opportunities that build confidence in learning environments with an affirmative culture. This in turn facilitates the development of new knowledge and new identities. We would not separate teaching and learning in any analysis of these transformative experiences. Transformative teaching and learning environments offer a dialogical experience that involves students in learning interactions with teachers and other students. These commonly draw on students sharing understandings of their prior learning experiences as a basis for moving forward.

- *I am actually going back, doing something and not just sitting in a cakey shop. And now I have my bits of paper, I have my confidence, I have my voice and I have a future. That's what education has given me: a life, a new life, a better life. It just opens up a whole new world and a whole new you. Suddenly, people are seeing you as you really are and not in the box that they have put you in.*

The Foucauldian notion of the 'subject as an effect of power' (Foucault 1982) can help us understand the impact of her transformative learning experience. Here the 'subject' is not just how we regard ourselves but maps across to how the person we are features within the different power networks that we connect to: it is how we are viewed by others. This isn't just about self-esteem but involves her sense of social standing and status as she interacts with others in wider society. A corollary of this is that transformative teaching and learning also heralds changes within existing social networks and the connection to new and different social networks.

- *I can now talk to people that I've never felt I could talk to: the doctor, the clinician. But now I have my bits of paper..., I have can talk and I have valid points to make. And I have a voice. If it wasn't for college, I wouldn't have that voice.*

Anita's account is important in the way it emphasises how her life experience, including suffering bereavements and moving away from abusive relationships fed into her choice of career, in this case social work. It seems appropriate to use the term 'vocation' to describe her enthusiasm and commitment to this career. In addition to providing evidence about the impact of transformative teaching and learning on the self as subject, Anita also talks about how her learning journey brought about a change of expectations in her family:

- *Through that, I've been able to inspire my kids. One's at Manchester University... he's in his final year. My daughter wants to go to Oxford to do Medicine. My oldest one has gone into the building trade and is doing fantastically well. He's gone into the management side. He would never have done that but he saw that I could do it. If mum can do it, I can do it. I like to think I have inspired them.*

This ripple effect – one of the wider social benefits of further education – extends from the individual, to their families but also beyond that and into the communities in which they live. A concrete example of this comes from Anita as she talks about how, since returning to further education, she has actively persuaded others to do the same:

■ *I love people... There isn't anyone that I have met who hasn't got some good in them, something you can bring out and something you can nurture. There's a girl that I met... she's just started her foundation degree in Health and Social Care. I persuaded her to do access... I met her in a pub, she was in a bad place. She started coming in for a chat. I encouraged her. Over a period of time she did the progression course... Another one that I've recommended: a young lad in the village... I absolutely badgered him. He was good kid going to waste. He's a hard worker. He just needed direction. He saw the resources that they've got (in college) and he was in his element. He signed up there and then. He's settled... it's lovely to see.*

In this passage, Anita illustrates how she became an advocate for returning to education in informal social spaces within her community. There are two points to make here: first it seems inconceivable that the two people she talks about would have returned to education without her intervention. Her intervention provides an illustration of how further education that is embedded in communities is less likely to have an issue with accessing so-called 'hard to reach' students and communities. In this way, her interventions also reveal the hollowness of notions of marketing and public relations that underpin the commodification of further education in these neoliberal times and that may be governed by commercial interest rather than the care and concern informing Anita's actions.

Education catalyses every stage of the journey to a better life, especially for the marginalised, poor and the most vulnerable. Further education can facilitate a learning journey which leads to hope and choice. For these students, further education offers transformative potential: a life-changing opportunity. Within this context, this report provides evidence that further education is a vital lever in the validation of learners' biographies and in the opportunity it offers for them to continue their learning journey in higher education and onto employment. Further education provides 'care' for the individual to develop levels of confidence and self-esteem that feed into agency and empowerment; these are essential to learner progress where a lack of self-confidence is often the greatest barrier.

7. Mental health and well-being

As we have evidenced, further education provides a wide range of social benefits that go largely unrecognised. Transformative teaching and learning has a huge social impact on students. Apart from the economic benefit for individuals in gaining qualifications and entering employment or beginning a new career, the benefits of further education extend into social cohesion, and family learning and learning for young people excluded from mainstream. In addition to those aspects already covered, further education colleges contribute strongly to the mental health and well-being of the communities they serve. It is no accident that GPs are increasingly opting for 'social prescription' and prescribing educational courses for people who feel isolated and whose well-being is suffering as a result. Further education is well placed to address some of the social challenges arising from an educational system that often seems overly competitive and focused on individual advancement rather than functioning as a public service whose purpose is to benefit all of society by catalysing people to realise their potential and take agency.

Elsewhere (Duckworth and Smith 2018C), we have identified how adult education can provide an empowering environment for learners to challenge symbolic and physical violence which can often trigger mental health episodes. Further education is shown to be beneficial in the positive effect it can have on mental health and well-being. Indeed, as Duckworth (2013) documents, deprivation and poverty are strongly linked to the prevalence of mental ill-health in communities. Clearly, adult education courses for young and older adults offer further opportunities to re-engage with education; they can contribute to personal development, including the development of so-called 'soft skills' such as confidence (a valued outcome in Barton *et al.*'s 2007 study) economic, social and health related benefits. The Learning and Work Institute's recent report (2018: 20) highlights how 'insecure and poor-quality employment is associated with an increased risk of our physical and/or mental health worsening, from conditions caused by work that in turn lead to absence due to illness, and worklessness'. Adult education courses offer a better chance to people of acquiring the tools needed to run their own lives, to reclaim agency and self-respect in their journey from learning into (often more fulfilling) work.

The research brought to light narratives about women's educational journeys which suggested a tipping point can be reached in people's lives when a combination of external circumstances can seem to create insurmountable obstacles to the realisation of hope. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), women are more vulnerable to the effects of this. As highlighted by WHO (2000):

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

Mental ill health is strongly linked to the prevalence of deprivation and poverty in communities. **Nyomi** was another project participant that we met in the North East of England. A mother with a young daughter, her story was one that involved completing a Diploma in Youth work but then finding, as a result of local authority cuts, that there were no jobs in that area of work. This, coupled with her responsibility as a carer for her partner isolated her and had a negative impact on her mental health.

■ *I kind of spiralled into quite a bad depression. I got pregnant, had my daughter and luckily my daughter gave us a little bit of a boost, so I went and got help for my depression... It was the Health Visitor that spoke to us and tried to get us to get a little bit of motivation and to go back out into the world and try again.*

In Nyomi's case, being on benefits carried a social stigma. She talked about the way she and her partner were 'looked down on' by neighbours while they were unemployed and on benefits. Nyomi's hopes for the future and plans were affected by the economic and employment conditions of the local area added to complex personal and family circumstances. Enrolling on an Access to HE course and having support for her dyslexia provided Nyomi with an opportunity to experience transformative teaching and learning. Nyomi talked about the ripple effects of her further education and the benefits for her family.

■ *I became a mam of somebody with a health condition. That was who I was. I wasn't who I had been. As soon as I got depression I went on a downward spiral. I found it very difficult going out... I had spent the last four years extremely depressed because of the way my life was panning out. I didn't think... I didn't see myself in education again. And it's hard when you come from living and not having a job and you know that you should be working... and nobody employing you... The only thing I could do to give my daughter some kind of life was to do the Access Course. It's been amazing... I came off anti-depressants which I'd been on for quite some time. I made friends with people. And I haven't really spoken to a lot of people in years. It really does change your life. It's allowed me to get back out... Within two months I was a completely different person.*



Nyomi It really does change your life

Nyomi's narrative is important because it shows how further education has a role in providing opportunities for people who are caught up in specific socio-economic circumstances. In this case, Nyomi's story is bound up in the economic and political history of the region. She came from one of the pit villages which lost all its employment after the Miners' Strike of the 1980s. While the impact of these circumstances are felt by individuals on a social and physical level, locally situated colleges open doors that offer people hope. Nyomi's further education did not involve her signing up for a 'retraining package' – important as such initiatives might be – rather, it was accessed informally, almost as a form of social prescription. Nevertheless, its impact has clearly been massive and has resulted in renewed hope within the family unit.

■ *I went from being in the house all the time or going to hospital appointments with my daughter to having something to look forward to. It (also) changed my partner into a more confident person. We were both in quite a bad situation when we were depressed because he was depressed too – but his was more to do with his health. So giving him some extra responsibility... he changed completely. Two years ago, he would never have gone back to college because he just didn't have that confidence. So he hid away from a lot of things.*

Nyomi's narrative illustrates how colleges can offer a route out of despair and how this positive impact can feed into family situations. Clearly, her renewed hope is likely to impact on the dynamics of the family and on her daughter's well-being. Nyomi's empowerment as a student also fed into her confidence and the value she felt in her role as a mother and partner.

There are echoes of Nyomi's story across other narratives in the research. Jade also mentioned her own mental health and the depression suffered by her friend. It is important not to underestimate the affective dimension of the learning experience that both Nyomi and Jade describe. Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Bourdieu 1994) is useful here. The meanings of habit and habituation that habitus carries within it may be connected to established social patterns of being and acting in the world, but they are also bodily, they connect with how we feel. In this case, feelings of acceptance within the classroom leads to rekindled agency. Both Jade and Nyomi's accounts communicate strongly a habitus associated with poverty and unemployment. For both, there was a relationship between these aspects of their lives and their mental well-being. The seeming intractability of their circumstances resulted in depression. This feeling of being trapped and locked into a pattern of life was broken by further education. Both women are motivated by hopes for their children. Their re-engagement with education and their new-found determination moves beyond being 'resilient' – an over-used label (like 'the deserving poor') that contains within it an implicit justification of the necessity of austerity measures. Both women were hopeful for their future and were happy that their further education meant they could be important role models for their children. However, the benefits of further education in this, once more, are inaccessible to the kind of measurement that yields funding for colleges. They are social benefits that will only come into view in the future. But that does not reduce their value.

8. Further education: planned futures & social mobility

According to our research, in terms of focusing on the issue of social mobility, further education colleges hold a uniquely important position in our current education system. More than any other in the educational landscape (including grammar schools) by virtue of sheer numbers and their ability to cater for people from across the social spectrum, colleges deliver handsomely in this regard. Opening up opportunities for social mobility in further education encompasses a range of substantive course and career pathways at different levels. It means providing routes that enable individuals to move out of poverty and gain financial autonomy. It can mean steering students through qualifications that lead to university but it can also involve colleges catering for the impact of poverty while students are studying.

Our research has thrown up examples in which colleges provide free breakfasts and/or other food for their students. Such initiatives have originated in a realisation that students are arriving at college having not eaten any breakfast. This may be indicative of chaotic home lives in which basic needs including nutrition are not being met. Providing clothing for students to wear while attending college is also not unusual. Funding students' bus passes is another common intervention. These are examples of colleges dealing with the fall-out from the extensive budgetary cuts endured by a range of public services contingent on the imposition of austerity measures by the last two governments.

Arguably, colleges addressing this level of student need is not what is meant when education is talked of as being an engine of social mobility. However, most of these interventions are about meeting basic needs as a pre-requisite to learning taking place and that fact illustrates that colleges are catering for sections of society for whom the idea of social mobility has real resonance. The definition of social mobility generated by the all-party parliamentary group on social mobility is worded in the following way:

■ *Essentially, social mobility is the extent to which where you end up, in terms of income or social class, is not determined by where you started (APGSM 2012)*

The two project participants that we will focus on in this section each illustrate some important truths about social mobility and about how further education can impact positively on people's life chances.

Marie arrived at college after splitting up with her violent partner. She found reading and writing hard and struggled with her confidence. Marie grew up in a large family on an estate outside Manchester (where she still chooses to live). In our conversation with her, Marie gave voice to some familiar themes. She talked about how she went back into education after a negative experience of school. She also talked about the power education had given her and her family to make choices in life. Further education brought about a turning point in her life when she became 'hooked' after starting a course at a local college rather than take up another low paid job opportunity. Through this, further education became the medium of her transformation and through her, brought about a big change in the opportunities and the educational and lifecourse trajectories of her family. As she stated:



Marie

■ *I don't care if (my son) stays in education till he's thirty years old. I want him educated because education gives you power and that's what I want my children to have. I want them to be able to make choices. Definitely, I want them to be able to... you know... say, 'Well actually I don't want to do that, I want to do that. And I want to go and live there, I don't want to stay there and live there. And I want to have a car and I want to do this.' Just choices... I want them to be able to go to Costa and get a coffee. Something I could never do... that's what education will give him: choices.*

One of the important things in the passage is the emphasis Marie places on the range of opportunities on offer that she wants for her children. This is about positionality in the world and a rekindled sense of agency to act in and on the world. As Bloch states:

- *Dreams... and possible things circulate inwardly which can perhaps never become outward. Of course, nothing would circulate inwardly either if the outward were completely solid. Outside, however, life is just as little finished as in the ego which is working on this outside. No thing could be altered in accordance with wishes if the world were closed full of fixed, even perfected facts. Instead of these there are simply processes, i.e. dynamic relationships in which the Become has not completely triumphed, The Real is process: the latter is the... mediation between present, unfinished past, and, above all: possible future. (Bloch 1986: 198)*

There are echoes in the renewed perspective on life and the world in Marie's narrative and Bloch's view of the way dreams and wishes (as expressions of hope) interact with the world. Key in this is the idea that the world is not fixed and that 'the Real' is an ongoing process of becoming that can be changed through individual agency. Transformative teaching and learning centres on this sense of becoming and offers a way forward for people who may feel trapped as 'failed' learners or in a cycle of deprivation and poverty.

Determined to improve her reading and writing, Marie grasped at education as a life line that provided a pathway for her towards a career in nursing. Through education, she wanted to challenge the intergenerational poverty of her background. She described how:

- *Through learning to read and write, 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 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.*

The research clearly highlights how educational journeys empower people by increasing their chances of getting jobs, staying healthy and participating fully in society (Duckworth and Smith, 2019B). The catalysing power of education flows beyond them and into an improvement of their children's life chances.

It's important to note that Marie – who is now a staff nurse – still lives on the same estate where she grew up. For Marie then, social mobility has not been about abandoning her background or turning her back on the community that she comes from. For us, this is a vital reshaping of the concept of social mobility which positions transformative teaching and learning as a catalyst that, through the ripple effect, yields social benefits that extend beyond the individual and the immediate family. For Marie, social mobility has been about acquiring skills and knowledge but not about changing fundamental aspects of her identity. Marie is still the same person, it is her financial and economic security and her perspective on the world that have changed. For our participants, social mobility doesn't have to or always mean moving away from one (poor) area to a more affluent one. According to our research then, transformative teaching and learning contributes to social mobility in the way it fosters agency with regards to future planning.

A second example that illustrates how further education connects to social mobility can be seen in Rithenella's account. Rithenella talked about how she returned to education as an adult, retaking her GCSE English & Maths and then joining an Access to HE course at her local college.



Rithenella

■ *I come from a looked after background with all the labels that are attached to that. I grew up believing I was thick, I was stupid. I wasn't allowed books when I was little. The carer told me that the reason I wasn't allowed books was that I was only ever going to be a cleaner. I spent my entire life believing I was thick. I left school with no GCSEs. I was in my 30s when I took my first GCSE... All the jobs I was doing were dead-end jobs. I did foster for a few years and that's what made me think: I want to be a social worker... This course is the best thing that I ever did: it changed my mind-set, how I used to think about myself and everything that I carried for years and years.*

Rithenella describes how her journey involved rejecting the spoilt identities that had been thrust upon her. Her inspirational account is illustrative of the idea that transformative teaching and learning often involves the student pushing against others' view of who they are and what they are capable of. It can also involve challenging the views they hold of themselves. Rithenella's 'looked after' background signals that she is likely to have had a disrupted experience of school and government publications acknowledge that the attainment of looked after children is well below that most of the young people. According to Ofsted: *In 2006, only 12% of these children achieved five GCSE A*– C passes, compared with 59% of all children (Ofsted 2008: 4)*

Interestingly, the kind of approach that is recommended to meet the needs of looked after children, with its emphasis on care, ongoing pastoral support and its holistic approach echoes our view of transformative teaching and learning. For example, from a list of nine key qualities that characterise 'effective practice', three have particular relevance:

■ *Making it a priority to know the young people well and to build strong relationships
Actively extending the horizons of each young person
Planning for future transitions (DfCSF 2009: 5).*

Rithenella's re-enchantment with education began with her re-taking GCSE Maths and English and then enrolling onto an Access to HE course. This provided a transformative teaching and learning environment which led to the realisation of her dream to go to university to study to be a social worker.

■ *(At university) I worked my derrière off. It's been great. I had this mind-set that university wasn't for me that people were from a different class. I went with this idea that it wasn't for me. But it was a real eye opener. It's such a mix. Nobody is better than anyone else... I'm always looking to improve as I didn't get any qualifications when I was younger.*

The role of further education as a bridge into higher education is clearly key in our claim that colleges are the greatest engine for social mobility in our education system as it currently operates. According to Smith et al (2015: 10), between 2007/8 and 2011/12 the rate of entrants in HE from further education colleges remained stable at around 33%. Funding arrangements for studying at university have changed considerably since the New Labour government set a target of 50% of young people entering HE. With this move towards 'massification' (Leach 2013), tuition fees have been introduced to address the issue of funding this expansion. For students from further education backgrounds (in particular, adults), these fees are an additional (and critical) stumbling block. Despite New Labour's concerted drive (1997-2010) to increase the participation rates of under-represented groups in HE, there remain significant gaps in the participation rates of people from some socio-economic backgrounds. Indeed, although the proportion of students from poor backgrounds attending university has increased significantly over time, the chasm in the HE participation rate between richer and poorer students remains glaring (Crawford et al., 2016).

Further education colleges' involvement is crucial in providing access to university level study as one aspect of the central purpose of enhancing the social mobility of the most economically disadvantaged sections of our population. The Institute for Fiscal Studies' 2016 report: Family background and university success: differences in Higher Education access and outcomes in England highlights how graduates are much more likely to be in work, and earn considerably more on average than non-graduates. In comparison, non-graduates are twice as likely as graduates to be experiencing unemployment 10 years after leaving compulsory education. The benefits of attaining a degree are also gendered: while there is a male graduate to non-graduate pay gap of £8,000 per year, the female graduate to non-graduate pay gap is £9,000 per year. The reach of further education colleges and their ability to connect with people from poorly represented social groups means that the impact of the service they offer is proportionately greater than schools and Vth form colleges. Routes offered by colleges into university are obviously hugely significant when viewed through the lens of social mobility.

We have explained the importance of social, cultural and economic capital in shaping students' experience of education. But, in its development of 'human capital', a type of capital that positions employability (and skills) foremost, higher education brings with it wider social and economic benefits (OECD 2017): better educated citizens contribute higher levels of productivity but they also enhance social cohesion within their communities. The research narratives of the participants illustrate how higher education provides a valuable means for improving economic and social mobility – not in a narrow individualistic but an inclusive sense in which the benefits of educational attainment are distributed to participants' families and communities. Vincent & Ball (2007) highlight that while traditional middle-class students are often advantaged through their family support system, it is important from a socially just standpoint that so called 'non-traditional' working class students are provided with the opportunity to develop and prepare themselves with educational dispositions and capital that can support academic development and success. Further education addresses this standpoint and our evidence shows how it impacts on a number of areas of participants' lives simultaneously. Indeed, the project has amassed a considerable amount of data to provide evidence in support of the above themes.

9. So what is transformative teaching and learning?

Our research has gathered evidence, both qualitative and quantitative, to provide a picture of what constitutes transformative teaching and learning. The data also provides insights that span across sociological and psychological disciplines. This is congruent with a view of transformative teaching and learning as having both individual (teacher / student) aspects as well as, for us, connecting with the sociological theory that sheds light on the impact of the policy context and the range of background factors that together shape how students and teachers come to and participate in educational activities and practices.

Our student survey sought to identify the kind of educational experiences that students valued in further education colleges. Our idea here was to supplement and our sociologically grounded data with data from the psychological domain. Using and adapting validated items from other psychological surveys (e.g. Beauchamp et al 2010), our survey set out to explore the extent to which respondents felt they experienced autonomy, 'competence', feelings of relatedness and behavioural and emotional engagement at college. The notion of engagement is often used in policy discourse to describe 'successful' teaching and learning. Here, we are moving beyond the label to redefine it as a state that is not (only) inherent in the students and is not (only) something that the teacher should be 'accountable' for, rather it is an effect of the social conditions of teaching and learning and a product of the relationship between student and teacher.

The survey data provides a wealth of evidence to support the view that student respondents had a positive experience in their colleges. Over three quarters (76.36%) of students reported having positive learning experiences at college 'often' or 'always'. This can be interpreted as providing evidence of the distinctive educational experience offered by colleges, particularly if viewed alongside the qualitative evidence that saw many feeling the need to reclaim spoilt identities caused by deficit labelling at school. To interpret the findings that follow, it is useful to note that responses to items were scored as follows: Never = 1, Rarely = 2, Sometimes = 3, Often = 4 and Always = 5. A prominent finding, which can be observed below, is that all averages are between 4 and 5 indicating that teachers attempted to facilitate the positive teaching practices 'often' or 'always'.

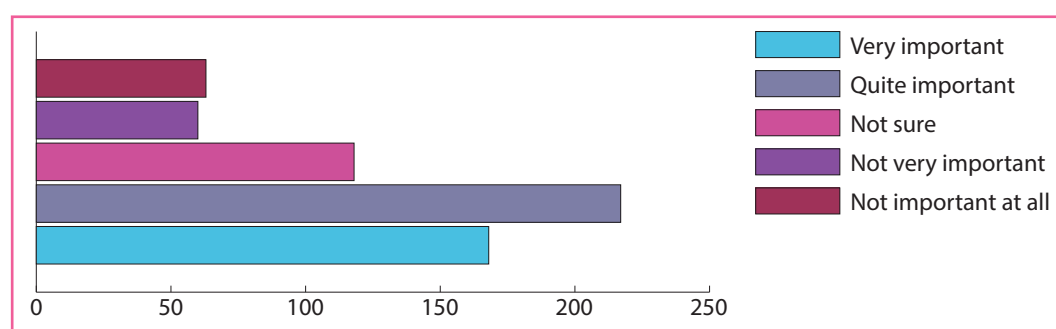


Figure 15 Do you have positive learning experiences at college?

Students reported feeling that they had autonomy at college and felt competent at college to the same extent (76.36%); for statements rated on a scale of 1-5 in which a higher score indicated higher autonomy /competence, the average score was 3.76 (in between 'somewhat true' and 'often true'). Using the same scale, the average score for the extent to which they related to other people at college was 4.00 ('often true'). The mean score for feelings of relatedness with teachers was particularly high (4.31, in between 'often true' and 'very true'), showing that students felt that teachers cared about them and were friendly towards them. This connects with important findings from the qualitative data. Students aged 35 years and over were more likely to believe that their fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness were being met at college.

We were keen to identify students' thoughts and feelings at the point of their transition into further education from schools. A series of survey questions related to this. In the questionnaire, students were asked to indicate the extent to which different factors were important when they started college (identified from our previous qualitative research). Descriptive data for four of these factors are presented below as well as any effects of gender and age on the scores. 'Very important' and 'not at all important' were scored as 5 and 1, respectively. Therefore, a higher score represented higher perceived importance of the factor when students began studying at college.

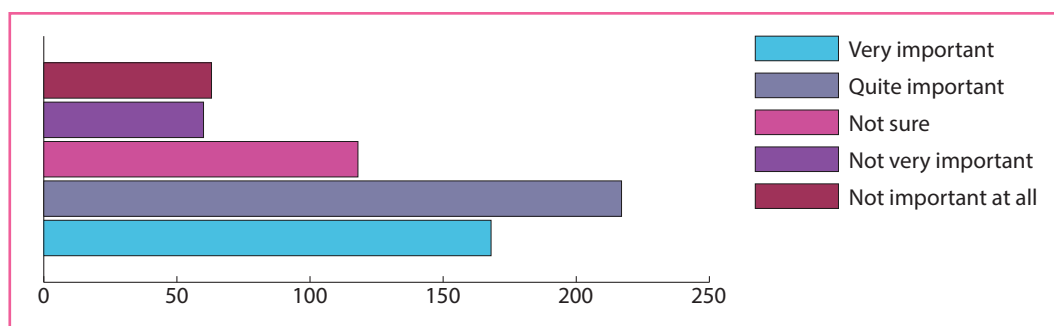


Figure 16 'Respondents' concerns about academic ability

For this question, female students scored higher, showing that they rated this factor as more important or perhaps indicating a higher level of anxiety in the transition period. There are other questions that arise in relation to this data. It could be interpreted as suggesting that students are bringing in an understanding about themselves as being a certain type of learner. For some this might mean they think they are poor learners. This connects with evidence from the project suggesting that confidence-building is a vital aspect of further education pedagogy. Students aged 14-16 years scored lower than the remaining three age groups suggesting that concerns about academic ability were not as important to them. This particular group (as exemplified by Adam in our qualitative data) is often in colleges as a result of schools seeking to find a different environment for them. There is a possible implication here that the college environment provides a preferred and less formal educational setting that suits them.

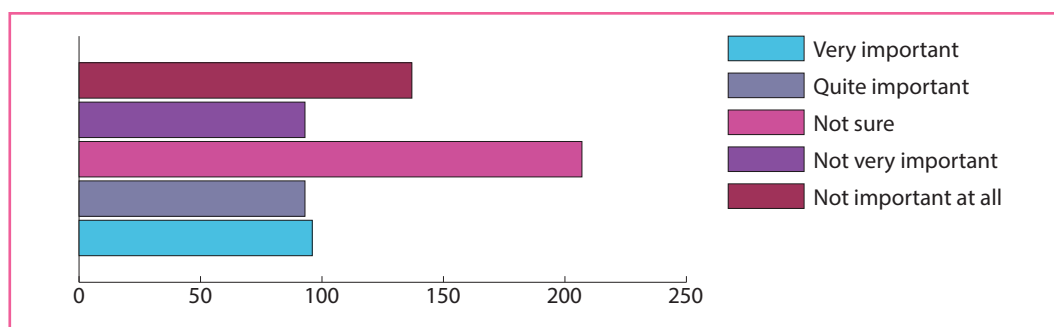


Figure 17 Being 'labelled' in the past

There were no differences for this factor in the scores of male and female students, or between the various age groups for this question. But this chart shows that roughly a third of student respondents felt that they had endured negative labelling by teachers at school. Once more, this highlights the distinctive contribution further education colleges make in having to address the (often negative) educational experiences of the students who walk through their doors.

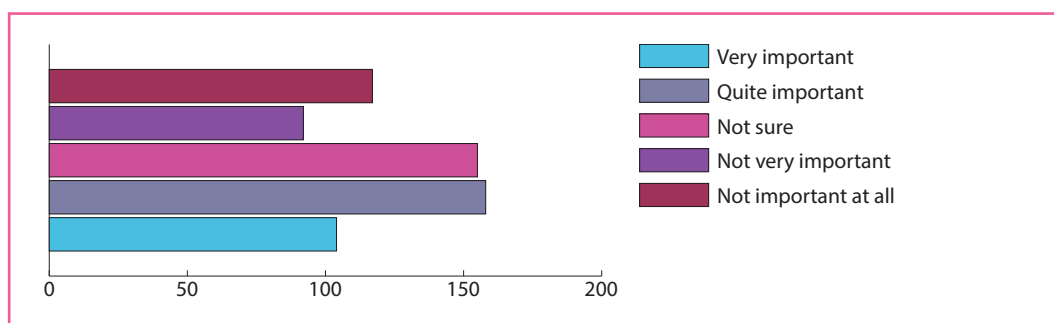


Figure 18 Feeling that they were no good at learning

From this chart we might conclude that the issue of self-confidence and the self-image associated with oneself as a learner is a prominent characteristic of students on arrival at college. This connects with the restorative aspects of transformative teaching and learning foregrounded in our qualitative data. Put another way, we can say that there is an important integral feature in the work of further education teachers. A first challenge that sits outside particular course curricula is the need to focus students on the reconstruction of positive learner identities. For this question female students scored higher than males suggesting that there is a gendered dimension to the prevalence of spoilt learning identities.

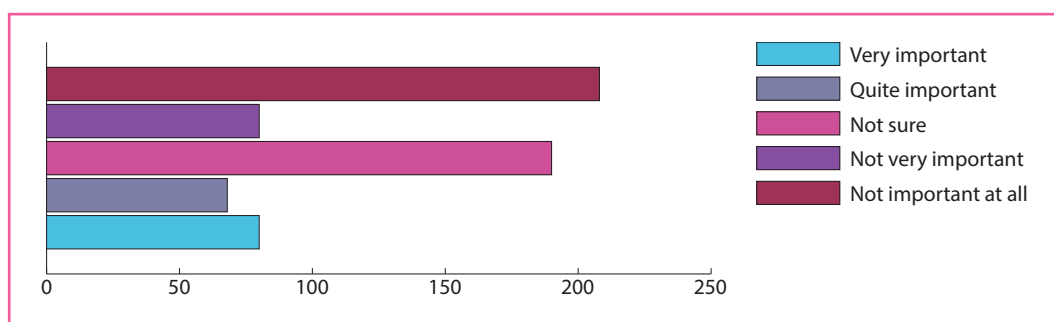


Figure 19 Undiagnosed educational needs

This chart shows how many respondents felt that they had learning needs which had not been diagnosed and how important they felt that was. Almost a quarter of respondents thought this was very or quite important. Again this says something about the characteristics of the student body in further education colleges. DfE statistics from 2018 claim that across all schools in England 14.6% of children had Special Educational Needs (DfE 2018). Our survey data appears to indicate that this proportion may increase in further education settings. Once more, in a context of budget cuts, colleges are absorbing additional needs that have to be catered for. Transformative teaching and learning can help to address these needs, if the conditions in the educational environment are supportive.

The students' motives for returning to further education were varied and included developing what might be considered soft skills e.g. confidence to leave the home, talk to other people to career aspiration and development; this was not without agency and reflection. We provided a lens to explore students' lives outside their college course. The students participating in the study had to juggle numerous elements in their lives, which included childcare, work and other caring responsibilities.

We would argue that what is often marginalised or absent in accounts of students is an understanding and real appreciation of their emotional realm and with that a deeper insight into a humanistic perspective of learning which validates their experiences as truly agentic and transformative.

Transformative teaching and learning and the importance of breaking the triple lock

While the survey sheds light on some of the psychological aspects of students' educational experiences in colleges, we are less concerned about producing an abstract definition of transformative teaching and learning than on elucidating the different components and contextual factors that contribute towards its realization. While the work of Mezirow (1990) and Illeris (2013) among others seeks to present a set of universal principles that underpin transformative learning, our work sees context as a vital component in any understanding of what transformative teaching and learning means. Our usage of the term 'transformative teaching and learning' in relation to further education emerges from and refers back to the contextual frame we outlined at the beginning of this report. It is a policy context in which further education has been denuded of its broad educational and social value and instead been re-cast in reductive and instrumentalist terms. It is also a context in which the age-staged tyranny of achievement matrices that structures schooling in the UK (Mansell 2007) seems to be having a negative effect on the mental health of young people and appears to stigmatise those who come away with low levels of achievement. Both the qualitative and the survey data provide evidence of the importance in transformative teaching and learning of a strong emphasis on building confidence to renew learning identities as a consequence of the 'symbolic violence' many students have experienced in their schooling.

The concept of symbolic violence originates in Bourdieu and Passeron (2013). They write about the symbolic system that education draws on to impose meanings on learners. They see education as imposing a standard culture whose values reflect the social structure and the power relations that underpin it. In other words, in a socially unequal society, education can perpetuate a stratification of individuals in a way that serves to replicate existing social inequalities.

It would be wrong to claim that experiences of symbolic violence in education are confined to schooling. Indeed, arguably, the current further education system in the UK is as or more susceptible to the hegemonic ideas that impose meanings and curricula on students in ways that do not best serve their interests. One way of viewing the way symbolic violence plays out in further education is through student objectification – a concept we will develop here. There are at least three forces of objectification – a triple-lock of symbolic violence – that students in further education can be said to be (potentially) subject to. The first layer of objectification is located in the 'skills' discourse outlined earlier. While not singling out or categorising individuals, this neoliberal ideological perspective provides a common-sense framework or understanding of further education as human capital production, an understanding that objectifies and dehumanises further education students.

The second layer of the triple-lock is more substantial and structural in the sense that it is reified by the current qualifications framework and the expectations, ways of thinking and student learning trajectories that this gives rise to. This second layer of objectification is visible in the qualification framework that enforces a binarist perception of young people as being either 'academic' or 'vocational' (Payne 2010). This is also a feature that has been reinforced by the stratification that the marketization of further education makes natural. Under this layer of objectification, particularly through policies that seek to represent further education as solely or primarily focused on vocational learning, further education students are 'classed' (Thompson 2010), structurally disadvantaged and positioned as low achievers.

The third and final layer of the triple-lock in further education is a further consequence of the competitive marketization that has emerged in further education. A key aspect of the incorporation of colleges in 1993 was that it introduced a transactional aspect to the relations between students and providers. While this supposedly privileged students through their choice as 'consumers', a more evident and significant effect was to incentivise teachers and managers in further education to view the recruitment of students in funding terms, as a 'bums on seats' exercise foregrounding the generation of income as each college's primary concern³. The survey also covered this point.

³ For a lengthier discussion of symbolic violence and transformative teaching and learning, see Duckworth and Smith 2018A

Teachers were asked to indicate the extent to which they perceived course funding to impact on their freedom to deliver aspects of their role. Findings are shown below each item (number of teachers shown after bars).

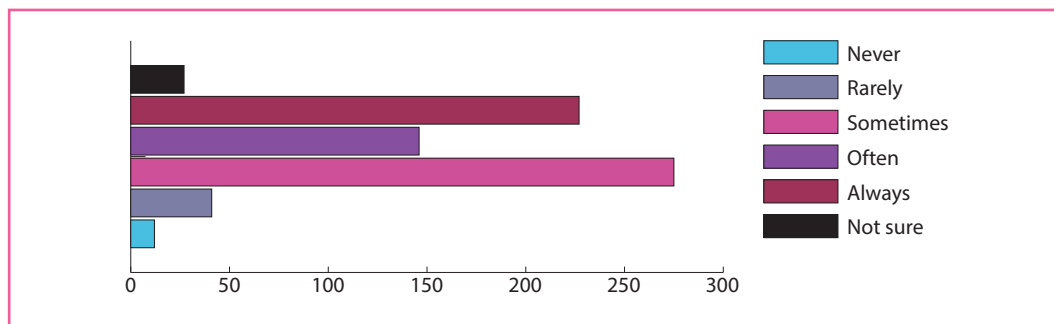


Figure 20 'To what extent does course funding impact on your freedom to meet your learners' needs?'

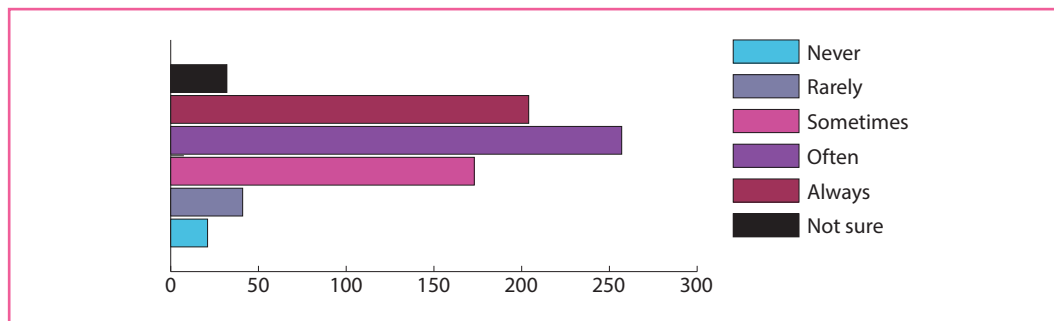


Figure 21 'To what extent does course funding impact on your freedom to support students to achieve their aspirations?'

Around two thirds of teachers believed that course funding 'always' or 'often' impacted on their freedom to meet their learners' needs and support students to achieve their aspirations. Despite this, the perceived impact of course funding on teachers' freedom had no effect on the extent to which they tried to foster positive student-teacher relationships or a sense of belonging in the classroom. This suggests that restrictions caused by course funding did not influence teachers' attempts to incorporate these positive practices into their teaching.

While this effect of funding arrangements has not been acknowledged by any Skills Minister in the last two decades, what it does is to position students as a means of obtaining and increasing college income: a priority that can and does over-ride the educational interests of the students themselves. Taking this triple-lock of objectification into account, it seems miraculous that transformative teaching and learning is taking place at all in further education settings, but our research provides evidence that it is. The conceptualisation of transformative teaching and learning as it emerges from this research is above all, an overturning of the symbolic violence embodied in this triple lock of objectification. Teachers in colleges break this triple lock when they seek to overturn the damage caused to students' learner identities in negative prior educational experiences, when they incorporate students' biographical experiences into the curriculum and when they strive to establish egalitarian relations within their classrooms. Arguably, this makes radicals of successful further education teachers; that isn't to position them as 'left-wing' or even as adherents of Freirean principles, but it is to flag up how their everyday practice can challenge and overturn the damaging and socially divisive effects of our current educational system.

Conclusions and recommendations

The power of sharing stories

The methodology underpinning this research sought to provide the participants with the tools to raise their awareness of how their experiences were shaped by structural inequality and through realisation, reflection and change shift accountability away from themselves in order to grow and reclaim agency. The dissemination of the research findings can be viewed as seeking to challenge the structural oppression that sustains this inequality. The people who work and learn in further education are seldom heard, and in many cases are not taken seriously. But their voices are central to this research and it validates their experiences and actively seeks to recruit them in the construction of new, shared knowledge.

The stories shared in the *Transforming Lives* project are important. Participants' experiences, their perspectives and their voices need to be listened to and heard. Through them we can all learn about ourselves. Their stories can also help us to reimagine society and to pinpoint what needs to change. Through their stories we learn about the ways that oppressive structural forces advantage certain individuals and groups of people over others in the public and private domains of their lives. We want the stories to continue to be shared locally, nationally and internationally, to speak back to negative representations and importantly to inspire others.

Hidden from view: bringing the invisible to light

Transformative teaching and learning experiences are largely hidden from view because their impact falls outside the metrics that drive further education policy and underpin funding in the UK (Duckworth and Smith 2018A). As we have evidenced, further education has many beneficial and transformative effects. It can re-ignite the spark of learning in people 'failed' by schooling. It can nurture individuals in pursuing their career aims. It builds stronger families and communities by challenging intergenerational inequality. In addition, colleges themselves can act as educational environments that foster social cohesion.

However, these benefits are currently not sufficiently recognised by funders and policy makers. The narratives of students whose lives are transformed do not convert into additional funding for colleges and yet, in many cases, these narratives involve people becoming independent, active citizens who actively contribute to society and to tax revenue. Also invisible is how teachers with heavy timetables carve out 'differential space' to interact with students in order to support them and address needs that are often nothing to do with coursework. The wider impact of both of these 'invisibles' remains unmeasured by funders or government. Instead, the efforts of colleges and teachers in these important areas are eclipsed by a myopic and ultimately crude assessment of their 'performance'. For that reason, we argue that further education needs to be viewed through the lens of transformative teaching and learning as this makes possible a reclaiming of educational space and purposes that do not objectify students in instrumentalist ways.

In conclusion, our research presents a mixed picture. First, it is important to state that government policy neither recognises nor supports transformative teaching and learning as we have characterised it here. In fact, our project data suggests that market structures and funding, if anything, militate against the achievement of educational environments conducive to transformative teaching and learning. That said, our research still suggests that teachers are directing their efforts to incorporate positive practices into their teaching and this is having a real effect on the experiences of students. Teachers are endeavouring to foster positive relationships with their students and a sense of belonging and respect in the classroom. In turn, students are reporting that their relationships with peers, and especially teachers, are positive and this is strongly related to higher behavioural and emotional engagement in the classroom.

Transformative teaching and learning is based on authentic engagement and collaboration between teachers and students, and colleges and local communities. We have gathered evidence about how college teachers prepare learners for lives of critical inquiry, active civic engagement and agency as socially responsible members of their diverse communities, locally, nationally and globally. The research recognises that participation in further education can help to address forms of social inequality. This links with social injustice in its various forms. Our research narratives reveal how the participants try to make sense of their structural positioning as learners in a society based on inequality of opportunity and choice. Through their educational journeys they challenge and transform existing hierarchies. This is another aspect of transformative teaching and learning. In that sense, further education classrooms can take on the characteristics of 'differential space' (Lefebvre 1991) as spaces and times in which agency can be rediscovered and an engagement with society on different terms planned for.

But these narratives seem to sit outside the current dominant policy narratives of further education. The extent to which transformative teaching and learning is or could be more than a phenomenon delimited and defined by the relationship between individual teachers and their students is dependent on the quality of the cultures that exist in each college and the conditions in which teachers work. The research indicates that transformative teaching and learning can take place even in 'hostile' (or as Fuller and Unwin 2004, would call it 'restrictive') working environments, but our contention is that, while unmeasurable by the current technology of metrics, college cultures that actively support staff in attempting to realise some of the principles and practices that we have identified as key features would 'put the students at the heart of the service' in much more than a merely rhetorical way.

The abundance of policy interventions in education in the UK over the last twenty years suggests the importance of the perceived link between education, the economy and a just and equal society. Further education seems to be even more vulnerable to policy intervention than other sectors (see Belfield et al. 2018: 37 which lists 25 important policy interventions since 2000). This may be because policy makers continue to view colleges in mainly instrumentalist terms. Such a narrow 'human capital' view of the purpose and function of further education fails to take account of the kind of the broader social benefits that are so powerfully articulated in the narratives of further education students. To think of it in terms of a binary system of input and output is to misunderstand fundamentally the human and social processes involved. Indeed, to view it in such terms, as incentivised by today's funding arrangements, risks objectivising the very people further education is there to benefit: namely the students. In addition, the consequences of viewing further education in these narrow instrumentalist terms effectively squanders the potential dividends that colleges could provide if the social benefits they produce were acknowledged and funding reflected and rewarded this. Here, we have in mind the kind of innovative approach to funding outlined by Hadawi and Crabbe (2018) who reimagine college funding drawing on a Social Earnings Ratio (S/E or SERatio) model that enables a calculation of the social value of colleges' activity, adapting an idea used in international finance.

It is in a context of severely reduced funding that the transformative teaching and learning we have evidenced in this report is taking place. Our contention is that the government cannot in all good faith take credit for that. Rather, in our view, colleges and their teaching staff are continuing to reach out to alienated learners, to engage with them, to take their aspirations seriously and to re-energise their view of themselves as learners **despite the policy and funding context created by successive governments.** Action and change is urgently needed if further education is to move beyond mere survival and to thrive. Government needs to stop hiding behind the rhetoric of 'excellence' and 'raising standards' while reducing college funding. In addition, government needs to start viewing further education as a **vital** component in the nation's educational offer and to provide the resources and the autonomy that are necessary for colleges to be able to fully operationalise their economic and social potential.

Removing the apparent barriers to participation in education is not easy but it is important; it is crucial to address intergenerational poverty and the transmission of inequality across generations of the same family (Duckworth and Smith, 2018A). Education not only helps individuals escape poverty by helping them develop the skills they need to improve their livelihoods, their families and communities but it also generates productivity gains that boost economic growth. For growth to reduce poverty, however, it needs to focus on overcoming inequality by improving the lives of the poorest and marginalised the most.

Class is not included as a protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010, meaning it is not illegal to discriminate against someone based on their (perceived) social class. And yet our evidence points to education as being 'classed': our research illuminates the inequality that many of the learners have faced throughout their lives clearly stems from this characteristic. Access and progression in education throughout the life-course is vital to achieve a socially just society and it can help ensure that the benefits of growth are fairly shared. With this in mind there needs to be a recognition of the structural constraints that many learners have to overcome in order to progress in their lives through routes that offer hope, agency and fulfilment.

There is an urgent need to break down barriers and to reconnect education to social justice. There is an urgent need for an enlightened and innovative politics of education that challenges unjust educational structures and that looks to new policies and procedures aimed at redefining what is at stake in the struggle for a better and more humane educational system. Such a system would position further education not just as a provider of skills for the national economy but as a force for local social cohesion and the renewal of educational opportunities as a key strategy in the achievement of social justice. Further education has a central role in this and should be funded and supported to help bring it about.

Some key themes

- Further education is a lifeline for people who face social and cultural disadvantage, combined with difficult personal circumstances.
- Further education offers people the chance to engage in education at multiple stages of life, recognising that their relationships to employment/education are not neat and linear.
- The impact of further education reaches beyond the individual as it also benefits the individual's family and often their community as well.
- Further education supports learners who are often in a state or period of transition emotionally (and often geographically).
- Further education offers positive benefits for people with mental health issues.
- Further education challenges intergenerational poverty and inequity.
- Further education is a catalyst for developing confidence and agency.
- Further education facilitates learners' ability to plan personal and career trajectories.
- Further education provides a crucial critical and creative space for futures to be imagined and enacted outside students' world pictures.
- Further education anchors multiculturalism.
- Further education offers a culturally diverse environment where cultures can be nourished and learnt from each other.
- Further education provides place and space for the construction of multicultural social identities in ways that promote cohesion in communities.

Participants' views of what constitutes a great learning experience:

- A teacher who cares;
- A teacher who 'believes in' their students;
- A trusting relationship with the teacher and with peers;
- A course that taps into their desire, commitment and passion;
- Teachers who sow seeds of hope and help students to look to the future positively;
- Teachers who provide opportunities to explore routes into HE, education and training;
- The experience of a diverse educational environment;
- Experiencing responsibility and high expectations;
- Overcoming doubt and taking on challenges.

Overview of the power of further education

- Further education is a powerful vehicle to drive forward social justice.
- Further education is vital for the transitions of marginalised and often silenced communities.
- National policy needs to engage more fully with the causes of inter-generational cycles of poverty.
- Further education can offer a stream of social capital which enriches learners' personal lives, enabling the formation of supportive bonds with other learners.
- Further education can bring about transformation in the selfhood and social identities of learners with few or no qualifications, reintegrating them as active survivors with renewed hope, vision and agency in our country's rapidly changing economy.

Looking Ahead

In this section, we aim to draw together the findings from the research and, after providing an overview of the current situation in further education, to recommend how government policy might change to enhance the transformative teaching and learning dividend. We begin though by focusing on the problems arising from a narrow and reductive government view of its purpose and its service users and the market model in which colleges have been forced to operate for the last twenty five years. After drawing on our research in relation to these key issues, we make key recommendations for some meaningful policies for transition that would fully acknowledge and support the broader important contributions colleges make to social equality and justice within the communities they serve.

These findings are of particular interest 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 and different service ‘silos’; a cohesive approach with a focus on challenging inequality and working towards social justice that empowers communities is a necessity. Further education has for many years provided a host of social benefits that have remained largely unmeasured. It’s time to recognise these important contributions and to re-prioritise educational funding to reflect this new understanding.

Further education is an overarching term that describes teaching and learning taking place mainly outside of school environments involving school leavers (although there is some 14-16 provision) and adults. Further education is largely shaped by historical, industrial and social factors closely related to local socio-economic circumstances in different towns and cities across the UK. While government skills policy over recent decades has become increasingly centralised, locally colleges continue to see their purpose and function in broader terms.

Is it time to de-incorporate colleges?

Incorporation, rather than freeing colleges up to be independent and entrepreneurial, as was intended, has instead shackled them to centralised policy whims. Arguably, incorporation was a pillar of centralisation and a means of harnessing colleges to a national skills discourse that has since proved to undermine and over-rule local ecologies and relationships between colleges and their communities. It is not possible to return to a model whereby local authorities exercise oversight because the local authorities as they were are gone. However, recent moves towards regional and municipal devolution may offer the opportunity to re-establish a locally coordinated further education system that foregrounds the needs of localised ecologies to everyone’s benefit. Austerity and the increasing centralisation of wealth and employment in London and the South East has led to an understanding that the competitive marketisation that underpinned incorporation is an irrelevant feature, particularly if it then requires government to initiate policy movements through cycles of incentivisation and the collection of endless amounts of (sometimes fabricated) performance data. Our conclusion is that a process of de-incorporation should be considered.

Colleges are typically seen as providers of vocational qualifications for ‘unacademic’ young people

Since incorporation, and under the premise of a ‘knowledge economy’, colleges have been tasked to provide a flexible, adaptable and skilled workforce to make the UK competitive in the globalised economy. The current policy emphasis in England appears to view the typical further education student as a working class 16-18 year old who needs ‘skills’ to get gainful employment. This instrumentalist policy view focuses on education for work positions and as a commodity, and marginalises issues of economic, political and social equality. The relationship between school and colleges is also poorly conceptualised and enacted. For example, there is a serious lack of parity in pay between schools and colleges (Ryan 2018) – probably as a result of the marketization brought about by incorporation. In addition, colleges are typically seen as providers of (only) vocational qualifications for young people who have not experienced ‘academic’ success in their schooling, whereas historically and still today, they continue to provide a range of academic and vocational courses. This matters because, as Reay et al (2005: 19) have identified, school success is linked to ‘the amount and type of cultural capital inherited from the family milieu rather than by measures of individual talent or achievement’. By forcing colleges into a vocational silo, this policy emphasis perpetuates the ideologically violent division between academic and vocational qualifications and, through that, consolidates structural inequality.

The market structure has supported the intensification of the instrumentalist view of further education

The problems associated with this instrumentalisation of the further education 'sector' are made more pressing by the market structures that colleges have to operate under. Established by the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) that removed colleges from local authority control, the current market model uses funding and 'incentivisation' to allow for on-going annual policy and curriculum intervention (Hammond 2003, Keep 2006, Crowther and Lucas 2016, Duckworth and Smith 2018A). This market structure has supported the intensification of the instrumentalist view of further education – closely bound to the emergence of neoliberal policy with its emphasis on 'skills' rather than broader conceptualisations of education (Duckworth and Smith 2019A). The ideological effect of the Further and Higher Education Act was to consolidate what has become known as 'the Further Education Sector', a generalised and 'abstract' space (Lefebvre 1991) that has facilitated policy making at a distance. This systematically superimposed a centralised drive to address economic and skills concerns over 'local ecologies' (Spours et al 2007) – the dynamic relations and considerations within and specific to a local environment and context – of teaching and learning. This, we would argue, impacts negatively on students' needs, interests and agency. An example of this would be where providers are forced to compete with each other for the same funding stream when setting up courses rather than coordinating provision locally. Why should our understanding of quality within further education be determined by the boundaries between different 'branded' institutions? Are the differences really that great? These are the assumptions that marketization leads us to give the status of common sense. But are the differences that are apparent contingent on institutional identities or are they really shaped by who the teachers are in any given subject and how those teachers relate to and care about their students?

Structural inequality – often strongly influenced by class – continues to shape life-courses and life-chances in decisive ways

Within this ideologically-driven meritocracy, class identities have been diminished in significance over recent decades. But while the idea of 'class' appears to be going out of fashion, our research affirms that structural inequality – often strongly influenced by class – continues to shape life-courses and life-chances in decisive ways (Duckworth and Smith 2017A). For young people often marginalised by poverty, further education provides hope, routes and agency and can enhance their life chances, opportunities for future education or training and future employment.

Further education and the 'triple lock'

A quarter century on from the F&HE Act, what is now clear is that the current further education market is not working. Our research exposes how the existing funding mechanism and market model objectifies students in ways that work against their interests. The common-sense economised consciousness in the current marketised system objectifies students in three ways – a 'triple lock' (Duckworth and Smith 2018A) of objectification. The first layer of objectification arises from the 'skills' discourse which offers a conceptual framework for the positioning and understanding of further education as (mainly or only) important for the purpose of human capital production. The second layer of objectification is structural and is reified by the current qualifications framework and the expectations, categorisations and student learning pathways that these give rise to. The current qualification framework enforces a binary and, we would argue, deficit-based perception of young people as being either 'academic' or 'vocational'. In this, adult and further education are viewed as primarily focused on vocational learning and in this way further and adult education are 'classed' and structurally disadvantages some students.

The third layer of objectification in the current system is a direct consequence of tightened budgets and the consequent need for 'efficiency'. Further education colleges have suffered more than schools and universities under austerity, losing more than 25% of their budgets for adult learning (UCU 2015). These cuts have exacerbated the already-there problem that has gridlocked every funding model since incorporation, exacerbated by an annual funding cycle, is that the recruitment of students has become incentivised as a 'bums on seats' exercise. The targeting of colleges for these swingeing cuts only serves to emphasise how policymakers in recent years have devalued further education. Overall, the market has become a mechanism for reinforcing the 'classing' of further education.

The positive impact of further education carries through to families, friends and communities – a ripple effect that produces broader social benefits.

Despite the triple lock, our research for the Transforming Lives project reveals the power of further and adult education to reach across diverse communities and challenge inequality. It is an enabler which draws on people's potential for personal and professional development in ways that enrich their lives. Adults who have previously been (and felt) marginalised and discarded are offered a lifeline that strengthens them and enables them to become successful students with agency. Importantly it supports people to rupture cycles of despair and mental ill-health enabling them to hope once more and move forward in their lives. The positive impact of further education carries beyond families and into communities – a ripple effect that produces broader social benefits.

Many of the students in our study have been disadvantaged for a long time; just as many have experienced social and economic inequality most of their lives. The research also allowed insights into the circumstances individuals were born into and the socio/economic and political landscapes that frame the fields they enter and travel through. It revealed that for many schooling is a site for intergenerational marginalisation, social exclusion and labelling.

Further education disrupts the rigid linearity of an education system that sorts students according to a qualification/age matrix

Drawing on our research we can say that neither Jade nor David (p46) attended compulsory education regularly. Both were both labelled by school teachers as being 'thick' and 'stupid'. But their narratives about further education show it can be disruptive of the rigid linearity of 'learning progression' at the heart of neoliberal models of education that assesses and sorts individuals according to a qualification/age matrix. Instead, it can offer organic tools for transformation and consciousness raising acting as a hope catalyst for significant changes in students' lives.

Adult education is necessary for personal enrichment and growth during the lifecourse. Compulsory education alone is not enough to meet the needs of the rapid changes in the world of work that we have experienced, are experiencing and will continue to experience in the coming years. Adult education is needed so that individuals can take agency as they develop, and collectively adapt to the world. This growth is bound to and driven by hope. Without the hope that further and adult education offers there can be little optimism for social justice and a future based on choice for all. Our argument is that colleges are ideally placed as vehicles for tackling social inequality and realising social justice: they are situated at the heart of their communities; they have a long-standing and deep-rooted understanding of their local industries and they understand their students' needs.

Recommendations

- **We need a funding model that takes proper account of the socio-economic factors of the students that colleges are providing for.** If students are coming from low income backgrounds and have additional needs associated with poverty, poor mental health and difficult home circumstances, then colleges need to be funded to address these.
- **The wraparound role of colleges in addressing students' needs must be acknowledged as an important aspect of further education pedagogy** – by government, by funders, by Ofsted.
- **Colleges should be re-positioned centrally as *the* non-linear model of education that is required for the twenty first century.** Policy and funding need to acknowledge the important role colleges are playing by providing flexible and part time routes not just as an additional part of a linear system. Colleges have to re-build damaged learner identities as a precursor to providing courses and qualifications. This often operates at the level of re-engagement but is an essential first step. Nowhere is this recognised in the current funding model.
- **Therefore, colleges need to be freed up from the prescriptive time-limits that are imposed on the courses they offer – that are imposed irrespective of the (educational and socio-economic) backgrounds of the students they provide for.** The vital restorative pedagogical work that further education teachers have to undertake means that additional time is necessary if students are to be given equal opportunities to achieve the qualifications they take. The annual cycle of funding is a part of the way colleges are straight-jacketed in what they are able to achieve. These cruel and unjust restraints fail to take account of student needs and reduce further education's potential to bring about social mobility.
- **College governance needs to be locally and democratically reconfigured.** There is a danger that the current move towards delegating some further education provision (e.g. through combined local authorities) will result in a locally managed replication of national government's traditional supply-side policy model. Twenty five years of weighting governing bodies with the voices of employers has produced scant benefits – particularly in terms of curriculum. Colleges have a key role that makes them much more than a component in the supply of 'skills' for employers. The wider social and health benefits of further education require the involvement and coordination of local authorities. The ability of colleges to address social inequality needs to be enhanced.
- **A dynamic national website which is populated by schools, employers, learners and families is needed.** Many people and communities are cut off from role models, aspirations and hope. It is hard to imagine a future without being able see others who have taken pathways outside your world picture and on seeing them realising 'if they can do it, so can I'. Role models are absolutely essential in demystifying routes into education, training and employment. Social capital is not homogeneous - it is not distributed equally. This platform would reach into institutions, communities and homes. In doing so its presence would rupture the divide between the public (which includes schools, further and higher education) and private domains, which includes work and home. This site would include case studies, career stories and pen portraits of role models as a form of cultural and social capital. These inspiring stories of diverse learner journeys would illustrate how real people have overcome adversity to reach their goal.
- **We propose a localised further education system in which colleges are viewed as important epicentres of social inclusion and cohesion that connect to schools pre-entry and employers and HE** on exit and that are accessible to people of any age to access to achieve the personal and / or professional development they need to thrive. Funding needs to reflect this.
- **We propose a holistic approach to engaging with questions of Sustainable Development that involves all stakeholders** in educational systems: students, staff across colleges and the local communities they serve. Local pedagogy and praxis is well-positioned to respond to the lived experiences of these communities (see Duckworth and Smith 2019B).

Endnote

A sustainable future which is socially, educationally and economically more just for all is vital. We hope the research we have undertaken for the Transforming Lives project has provided an opportunity to explore how colleges can be critical spaces of possibility for change. Further education colleges can and should become spaces that recognise and address the diverse needs of different communities. We suggest that there needs to be a shift towards developing transformative democratic ecologies of teaching and learning for all young people and adults after school. This will require a radical reimagining of the current education service in this country.

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