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Transformative teaching and learning: a lesson for the future

In a climate of tight FE funding and cuts that can objectify students, a research project aimed at transforming lives and communities focuses on learners' interests, with care at its core
By Dr Vicky Duckworth and Dr Rob Smith

Over the past 18 months, the Further Education in England: Transforming Lives and Communities research project, funded by the University and College Union (UCU), has gathered evidence about transformative teaching and learning (TTL) from more than 30 colleges and their communities across the UK (Duckworth and Smith 2017a & 2017b). TTL is a lens for exploring teaching and learning in further education settings that puts learners' biographies, practices and interests centre stage.

The way further education is funded, not just in terms of the cuts providers have experienced over recent years, but the prescriptive annual funding cycle itself, with its reductive and continually changing incentives and disincentives, often means that providers are forced to objectify students. This is something highlighted by Professor Alison Wolf in her 2011 review of vocational education.

"The system still creates perverse incentives by strongly encouraging institutions to put together bundles of qualifications on a 'profit maximisation' basis rather than by conceptualising programmes for students in a holistic way." (Wolf 2011, p120).

We see this as one aspect of what we call a 'triple lock' of student objectification. The triple lock comprises: i) the international discourse around skills and globalisation; ii) the academic/vocational divide (particular to England) that writes off many further education learners as 'unacademic' at the age of 16, and iii) a funding regime that conditions college teachers to recruit and retain each student as a source of funding for the college.

TTL relies on institutions and individual teachers working together to ensure that teaching and learning is freed from these reductive and damaging constraints, so that the full transformative potential of the further education experience can be realised.

What are the key findings of the research?

Our research reveals that TTL means different things for different learners. We can illustrate this by referring to two case study participants.

For Adam, TTL meant moving forward after a negative experience at school: "I felt like a nobody and not listened to … invisible, and I hit out against that." Further education for Adam meant discovering that he could succeed at learning and he could connect that achievement to plans for his future.

He described how the teachers on his college course spoke to him in a different way. Adam's sense of being 'dumb' and ignored, which was, in his mind, connected to teachers' labelling him as coming from a particular estate with a 'reputation', was replaced with a relationship in which he was able to take responsibility for his learning and establish a new, positive learner identity.

Importantly, our research also maps TTL as a broader social benefit. Adam's mother described the relief she felt at no longer receiving phone calls every day and sometimes having to leave work to pick her son up from school. Anxiety was replaced with pride.

For Claire, TTL was different but equally profound. Returning to an Access course 'opened my eyes to a different world'. She spoke of the power she experienced in the classroom through simply being listened to and how that educational space became a springboard for re-entry into the world as someone with more self-confidence who was empowered and assertive.

From there Claire went on to become a qualified teacher: "I'm not the same. I used to think men do this and women do that. Now I know that's not how it needs to be."

Claire's account illustrates some important attributes of transformative learning environments. Central in these is the sense that participants have of not being 'judged' and of 'being accepted for who you are'. The research highlighted how by experiencing success, learners have the capacity to act as role models and raise aspirations and hope.

So what does this mean for teachers in further education?

The TTL lens connects with the Professional Standards for Teachers and Trainers in Education and Training in several ways. TTL challenges teachers' theoretical understanding of what constitutes effective practice.

It illuminates how the real barriers to effective practice may be related to 'bums on seats' cultures (Duckworth and Smith 2018A, 2018B). It allows us to see that quality assurance mechanisms that emphasise retention and achievement may actually interfere with transformative learning. It shifts the focus on what constitutes effective practice away from searching for a technical means of delivering a body of knowledge and towards approaches that respond positively to the cultural dimensions that students bring with them.

This means that teachers can focus on establishing and sustaining the enriching, caring, dialogic relationships with students that are founded on knowing them, understanding their backgrounds and, through that, communicating their belief in them as learners.

TTL requires curriculum space, not just within the classroom but in terms of the management of time. One clear principle relates to student motivation: an investment of time is essential at the beginning of any course that focuses on the classroom as a social learning environment, and that works to provide a bridge between students' lives and curriculum.

Ultimately, TTL is about shifting to more empowered models of curriculum based on a college-wide ethos that reconnects with the holistic purposes of further education.

- For more information visit the project's website at **goo.gl/Q47Rra**
- You can also follow project updates on Twitter @FETransforms

Resources

- Duckworth, V. and Smith, R. 2017a. Interim report: Further education in England - Transforming lives and communities. London: UCU.
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Why a pedagogy of teacher education is so important
By Dr Jim Crawley

When I carried out research into the professional situation of teacher educators in the sector from 2009 to 2014, I felt it was essential to consider teacher education pedagogy as teacher educators (TEds) perceived and experienced it, because it is impossible to teach others how to teach without at least considering aspects of the method and practice, or pedagogy, of education.

Research by Clow and Harkin (2009), Cochran-Smith (2003), Harkin et al. (2008), Korthagen et al. (2005) and Lucas and Nasta (2010) all supported the notion that pedagogical principles were important to the professional values and identities of teacher educators, and indeed teachers in general.

Using focus groups, a discussion on a training course (totalling 135 participants) and a survey completed by 161 (still the largest survey of this group undertaken), I asked a range of questions, some of which were designed to collect views and perceptions about teacher education pedagogical principles and values.

I then devised a set of five key pedagogical principles in teacher education which reflected the results. They are:
1. Teacher education has a moral role in the development of inclusivity, reflective practice and social justice through teaching.
2. TEds model practice (often through 'golden moments'), perspectives, ideas and situations to help teachers reflect on, and develop, their own perspectives and perceptions of teaching and professional identity.
3. There is no overall agreement around the place of learning theory in teacher education, but this group of TEds mainly supported experiential, expansive and student-centred theories.
4. Developing learning communities of reflective practitioners with their trainees, and connecting theory, practice and the workplace through these communities are a high priority.
5. The operating environment of FE and training has features recognisable in Schön's (1983) model of the 'swampy lowlands', and mediating the effects of this situation is a further pedagogical priority.

Although important to teacher education, it is possible to test out any subject in the FE and training curriculum and how it is organised, supported and taught using these pedagogical principles devised from teacher education. Try it out.

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- Schön, D. (1983). The Reflective Practitioner: How professionals think in action. New York: Basic Books.
- Jim's MESH Guide on FE and training teacher education pedagogy is available here **goo.gl/rB7saH**
- Jim is the key contact for the Teacher Education in Lifelong Learning (TELL) research network. They have four regional meetings a year with the #TELLnetwork.

Transformative initiatives result from holistic efforts that bring about changes in professional learning, curricular planning, assessment and evaluation, policy frameworks, and more. Poorly planned initiatives can waste time and money, widen inequity, expose private data, reduce confidence in the education system, and delay the potential benefits. Chapter 7. Information and Communications Technology: Platforms for Learning and Teaching. Learning-focused educational technology initiatives start from a clear vision of the intended goals and an understanding of how powerful mobile devices and other information and communication technology (ICT) can help schools achieve them. The transformative competencies can be taught and learned in schools by incorporating them into existing curricula and pedagogy. For example, countries can embed the competency of "creating new value" into such subjects as the arts, language, technology, home economics, mathematics and science, using an inter-disciplinary approach. To thrive in the future, learners will have to be able to take into account the many interconnections and inter-relations between seemingly contradictory or incompatible ideas, logics and positions, and consider the result of their actions from both short- and long-term perspectives. This lesson follows a mathematics-focussed module on proofs and conjectures, with a focus on circle and triangle theorems. Technologies will facilitate teaching and learning process. Learning will come to be more creative and practical. Students will be assessed on critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. To thrive in the workplace of the future, skills such as creativity, collaboration, communication and problem-solving will become must-have competencies for future specialists as the market will see a huge increase in jobs requiring a mentioned set of skills. In the classroom, students are taught SEL skills through discussions, cooperative group work, problem-solving and group reflection. Parents also encourage children to develop SEL skills by remaining involved in their child's education and providing a safe environment that will foster their further development. In this lesson learners are provided with an opportunity to think about how schooling may change in the future. They work with pictures showing two different children, predicting what they might see around them and comparing the full scenarios. They imagine what learning is like in the future for the children in the pictures and write about it, then think about how learning might really change. Finally, there is a short language focus on will and then the learners do a project on the 'perfect' school of the future. Aims. A combination of the lesson plan for online teaching and the lesson plan for face-to-face teaching can be used in 'hybrid' situations, where some students in the class are studying from home and others are physically in the classroom. Some lessons are best learnt, when they are taught outside of the classroom. Organize field trips that are relevant to the lessons or just simply take students for a walk outside of the classroom. Students will find this fresh and exciting. Without taking much effort, they will learn and remember what you teach them. 6. Role Play. Teaching through role-playing is a great way to make children step out of their comfort zone and develop their interpersonal skills. Schools associated with Early Years Foundation Stage(EYFS) will vouch for the fact that the learning environment has a prime role in learning and development. 9. Welcome New Ideas. An open-minded attitude can help you in innovating new teaching methods.