England Impact Forum Seminar
1330-1600 16 May 2017
Learning and Work Institute, 21 De Montfort Street, Leicester. LE1 7GE.

Background

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

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

These areas broadly reflect research undertaken as part of the UK work programme for the European Agenda for Adult Learning. Both sets of research illustrate how adult learning impacts on a number of areas of our lives simultaneously. Indeed, the UCU research project *Further Education*: *transforming lives and communities[1]* which draws on a series of in-depth interviews and a gathering of reflective written responses from FE learners and professionals, to ascertain the transformative power of FE highlighted that:

- **Reclaiming identities:** FE enabled learners to reclaim their spoilt educational identities, to reconstruct them, to reposition themselves within their personal relationships and to re-enter their families and communities as active and resourceful individuals with hope and renewed status.
- **Empowerment:** Learners' accounts revealed FE courses as pathways to overcoming problematic and painful domestic issues; for example, abusive relationships, alcohol dependency and mental health issues.
- **Mental health and well-being**: For several of the participants, FE offered a lifeline that helped in their recovery from a mental health issue. Transformative education is drawn from and situated within individual and communal resources. The positive impact of the transformation extended to their family circumstances.

(Duckworth and Smith, 2017)

In addition, Duckworth's (2013) study of sixteen adult literacy learners returning to Further Education, illuminated how learners' histories and biographies can impact on their learning environments. Teachers' awareness and sensitivity to the issues that learners bring into the classroom, and the development of strategies for dealing with them effectively, are important if the barriers are to be addressed. This may entail therapeutic interventions for those who are most vulnerable, such as those with mental health issues and/or physical disabilities. Indeed, literacy and wider education has been shown to enhance confidence, contribute to personal development, promote health, social and political participation and lead to benefits in the public and private domains of learners' lives. These findings are particularly interesting to commissioners of a range of services in cities and devolved administrations. With devolved budgets and outcomes-based local commissioning arrangements over the coming years we are likely to see changes to the way adult learning and education works. This, we would argue, requires joined up thinking across discipline areas; a cohesive approach with a focus on challenging inequality and working towards models of social justice that empower communities.

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

This would suggest that pedagogy of transformation driven by social empathy, care and solidarity are essential. Educators can also invite students to take part in a larger community discourse that attempts to solve problems and create alternatives to oppressive situations (Duckworth and Maxwell 2015). This requires a conceptualisation of the theoretical and methodological issues involved in understanding and representing the literacy curriculum based on respect, where learners can flourish in the public and private domains of their life and reach their potential (Duckworth, 2013; Duckworth & Smith, 2017).

But to what extent is the adult learning workforce ready for these changes? This is a crucial question if we are going to provide a meaningful strategy and approach that reaches out to and works within diverse communities. And how far will professionals be involved in planning for change? What challenges do practitioners face in supporting high impact, transformative adult learning? What knowledge and skills sets do they need? Is current development support offering what they need? How will colleagues be supported and enabled to develop / take charge of their professional development? What changes should be made to the current offer to practitioners?

Seminar aims:

This seminar aims to create a critical dialogue that facilitates the:

- Sharing of effective practice and discusses the challenges / issues professionals currently face
- Exploration of the professional development challenges ahead and the action required to take the agenda forward in a productive and positive way

1230   Arrival and networking lunch

1300   Introductions and format of the seminar (Mark Ravenhall)

1310   What the research says on the impact of adult learning and how professional development could work (Jan Eldred / Mark Ravenhall)

1330   Transformative Further Education: what works case studies (Vicky Duckworth / Rob Smith)

1350   Questions, clarification, comment and debate

1415   Group work: what works, what are the issues, what needs to be done about them?
- Initial Teacher Education
- Professional Development
- Leadership and Management Development

1500   Bringing the ideas together
- What are the common themes?
- What further research and development needs to be moved forward?
- What actions need to be taken (and by whom)?
- What needs to be said in the final UK report?

1545   Summary of key actions

1600   Close of seminar

Bibliography

- Duckworth, V. (2013) *Learning Trajectories, Violence and Empowerment amongst Adult Basic Skills Learners.* Research in Education. London: Routledge
- Duckworth, V. and Maxwell, B. (2015) Extending the mentor role in initial teacher education: Embracing social justice, *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 4 (1) 4-20
- Duckworth, V. & Smith, R. (2017) *Further education in England – Transforming lives and communities: Interim report.* UCU