

Institution: Edge Hill University		
Unit of Assessment: C23 - Education		
Title of case study: Recognising the transformative effects of further education to inform adult learning and skills policy and practice		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Vicky Duckworth	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: November 2007 – to date
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research undertaken by Professor Vicky Duckworth at Edge Hill University into the transformative role of adult education, lifelong learning and adult literacy has had a significant impact on policy and strategy in the UK. Duckworth's research as part of the Transforming Lives project has provided evidence of the transformative effects of adult education and subsequently influenced policymakers across the political divide in the UK, prompting the establishment of a GBP2,500,000,000 national skills fund by the UK government in 2020. The findings have also informed decision making in Guernsey, saving its further education college from closure. The research has also been used by UNESCO to provide policy advice to member nations on the transformative potential of adult learning. Finally, the project outcomes and materials have provided a robust evidence base to embolden and strengthen the activity of further education providers in the UK and beyond.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Duckworth's research on transformative literacy and education challenges dominant models of education that focus on functionality and preparing students for the labour market. This instrumental approach influences what is taught, how teaching and assessment take place, and institutional funding; it also reduces the outcomes. In contrast, Duckworth's research takes a critical perspective, drawing on Bourdieu, a range of feminist, sociologists of education, the ethics of care and critical literacy pedagogy, including the New Literacy Studies. The research amplifies grassroots' voices, and identifies the political, social and economic factors that have marginalised many of today's adult learners. Transformative education addresses these issues through the learning process, addressing inequality and promoting social justice, with benefits for learners, their families and communities, and wider society.</p> <p>The Transforming Lives (TL) project, undertaken on behalf of the University and College Union (UCU) examined the impact of further education (FE) on marginalised learners, their families and communities, and provides evidence about what transformative education is and how it creates these impacts. The first phase of the research (2016-17) used a sociological lens [R1] 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 (2017-19) expanded the qualitative data set by surveying staff and students. This enabled the expansion of the central concept of transformative education. Evidence was collected from across 35 institutions, and 150 participants: learners, teachers, managers, employers, community members, parents and other family members. Key findings were [R3, R4, R5, R6]:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners often had negative prior experiences of education including labelling at school, which were accepted, and resulted in low self-confidence, under-achievement, and a lack of aspirations. [R3 and R6] • FE enabled learners to reclaim and reconstruct their spoilt educational identities, providing self-confidence, hope and status. [R4 and R6] • FE courses could provide pathways to overcome domestic issues, such as abusive relationships, alcohol dependency and mental health issues. [R6] • Personal growth within FE gave learners personal, financial and health benefits, and contributed to overcoming economic, social, political and cultural marginalisation. • Individual benefits have positive 'ripple effects' for learners' extended families and wider communities. [R3] 		

- Colleges challenge the stubborn cycle of intergenerational inequality and become hubs of social cohesion. [R4]
- FE provides a host of social benefits that have remained largely unmeasured and unrecognised, because they are hard to quantify. [R5]
- The role of the teacher is central to the quality and transformative nature of the learning experience, through behaviour and emotional engagement with students. This involves carving out 'differential space' to interact with students, to support them and address needs that are often nothing to do with coursework. These positive relationships demonstrate respect and promote students' sense of belonging in education – and contribute to educational success and the wider outcomes identified. [R6]
- FE should be seen 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. This is not recognised in the current funding model. [R3]

The theoretical lens used to inform the Transforming Lives research emerges from Duckworth's earlier research on literacy [R1]. Based on the experience of sixteen literacy learners, applying a feminist, qualitative, longitudinal, ethnographic and participatory methodological approach, the research offers a critical perspective: symbolic violence, symbolic culture and structure reproduce educational and social inequality. The research exposed the barriers learners face in both public and private domains, and how class still matters. Literacy is not neutral, but rather a tool of social power, that can be used to overcome inter-generational poverty. The research recommended mobilising the term 'transformative teaching and learning' to signify educational experiences that are not only student-centred, but which defy, counteract and work against the neoliberal functional approach to education, which marginalise adult learners, their families and communities.

These theoretical insights contributed to further conceptualizing of the social model of literacy [R2], which understands literacy as a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill. Literacy and adult education are dynamic, and shaped by the 'trinity' of theory, policy and practice. Duckworth's research identified the dominance of ideological policy (i.e. literacy as skills for employment), which controls practice through the associated funding mechanisms. In contrast Duckworth's research demonstrates the role of literacy in both private and public domains of people's lives, which includes but is not limited to labour market opportunities. Transformative education is an equitable approach to adult literacy, and adult education more broadly, that disentangles itself from instrumental approaches driven by neoliberalism, by creating meaningful relationships with staff through critical spaces for contextualised and emancipatory learning. The process is different, and the benefits are greater.

3. References to the research

R1. Duckworth, V. (2014) *Learning Trajectories, Violence and Empowerment amongst Adult Basic Skills Learners*. Research in Education. London: Routledge.

<https://www.routledge.com/Learning-Trajectories-Violence-and-Empowerment-amongst-Adult-Basic-Skills/Duckworth/p/book/9781138282919>

R2. *Landscapes of Specific Literacies in Contemporary Society: Exploring a social model of literacy* Duckworth, V. (ed.) & Ade-Ojo, G. (ed.), 2015, London: Routledge. 224 p. (Routledge Research in Education)

R3. Duckworth, V., & Smith, R. (2018). Breaking the Triple Lock: Further education and transformative teaching and learning. *Education + Training*, 60(6), 529-543. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-05-2018-0111>

R4 Duckworth, V and Smith, R (2019) 'Research, criticality & adult and further education: catalysing hope and dialogic caring' in Hamilton, M and Tett, L. (Eds.) *Resisting the neo-liberal discourse in Education: local, national and transnational perspectives*. Bristol: Policy Press.

R5 Duckworth, V. and Smith, R. (2020). Creative, Critical and Democratic Research Dissemination: Learners' Lives and Further Education. *Doing Critical and Creative Research in Adult Education*, [online] pp.217–228 https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004420755_018

R6. Duckworth, V., & Smith, R. (2018). Women, adult literacy education and transformative bonds of care. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 58(2), 161-186. <https://www.ajal.net.au/downloads/women-adult-literacy-education-and-transformative-bonds-of-care/>

R3 and R6 are published in rigorously peer reviewed journals of international standing. R1 and R2 are monographs published by Routledge and have been peer reviewed. R4 and R5 are book chapters and have both been rigorously peer-reviewed.

4. Details of the impact

Historically Further Education is an under researched area that has often been overlooked politically and marginalised. The Transforming Lives (TL) project has allowed the Further Education sector to tap into a powerful body of evidence that supports its remit, purpose and place both within society and education. Running since June 2016, the project and its outcomes have been communicated across the project website and social media outlets. The project website (<https://transforminglives.web.ucu.org.uk>) makes available resources for further education teachers, academics, employers, policy makers and the general public but also crucially provides a platform for them to share their stories detailing the transformative impact of further education on their own lives and communities. The website has over 11 thousand active users and over 67,000 page views.

Duckworth's research via the TL project has played a critical role in transforming Further Education (FE) in the UK and internationally. It has contributed to policy, changes in implementation of adult literacy and education, assessments of progress and achievement and to the thinking of national and international bodies. Duckworth has used her longstanding research expertise to engage extensively with FE leaders, practitioners and learners. In addition, the work has led to extensive policy engagement that has shaped the further education and skills policy landscape in the UK extensively. The work has had impact beyond the UK contributing to a program of work in Australia on adult learning and leading to significant strategic decisions on the future of FE colleges in Guernsey.

Shaping adult education and skills policy in the UK

As a result of Duckworth's extensive engagement with policy makers the outcomes and findings of the Transforming Lives (TL) project have been recognised and acted upon across the political spectrum. The outcomes from Phase 1 of the project in 2017 drew considerable attention across the political spectrum and raised the awareness in political circles for the first time of the potential for transformative impact from FE.

Duckworth and co-researcher Smith were invited to meet with then Minister of State for Education to discuss the results from phase one of the project. The former minister, now Chair of the House of Commons Education Select Committee 'ascertained just how important and transformational Further Education can be for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.' The potential for transformative education that the project uncovered encouraged the then Minister to 'do everything possible to make sure every pupil - whatever their background - can access good quality Further Education provision.' The project started to inform political decision making in 2017 'The Transforming Lives project was an essential component in informing and influencing key stakeholders including Ministers at the time' [E5]. In turn the Labour Party recognised the project in 2017 when the then leader of the party openly supported the project and UCU campaign for investment in FE based on the research, highlighting some of the specific findings around the transformative potential of FE [E10]. In particular the social and personal benefits were emphasised alongside the need for further teachers within FE colleges, these are direct outcomes from the first phase of the research.

Following the initial acknowledgement of the research and UCU campaign by the Labour party Duckworth was invited by the Shadow Minister for Further and Higher Education to become a member of Labour's Lifelong Learning Commission (LLC). As a member of the LLC Duckworth fed in evidence from the Transforming lives project. This body of evidence and research contributed significantly to the interim and final reports from the commission. The final report 'The Future is Ours' [E3i] contained a number of key proposals and recommendations stemming directly from the TL project. Notably the report included, 'Education as a tool for social inclusion and participation[...is] central both to our collective prosperity and to building a fairer society where no group or community is left behind' directly citing the TL project report. A fellow member of the LLC and head of AccessHE states 'Duckworth's work played a crucial role in shaping the work of the LLC. Her research and expertise in the field of adult and further

education fed directly into the LLC's main recommendation i.e. that all adults in the UK should have a statutory funded, right to learn' [E9] The report included a number of recommendations based on the TL project and its findings including a universal funded right to learn, a lifetime enrolment, a focus on place and local needs and the need to recognise the importance of FE in social justice.

The LLC final report subsequently fed into the Labour party manifesto for the 2019 General Election which included a free lifelong learning pledge to certain levels alongside grants for disadvantaged learners. Indeed, the introduction to the National Education Service Labour proposed within the manifesto includes a statement that 'education isn't just vital to our economy – it lets people develop their talents, overcomes injustices and inequalities and helps us understand each other and form social bonds' echoing the findings from TL and moving away from an instrumental view of education – a key recommendation in the final report [E3ii]. The head of AccessHE and fellow LLC member confirms that the recommendations from the TL research were adopted by the Labour party for their manifesto and 'and remain official Labour Party policy'.

In response to the position of the Labour Party outlined in [E3 i and ii] the Conservative Party included a commitment to a national skills fund in their 2019 manifesto. In the manifesto it states, 'The National Skills Fund will help to *transform the lives* of people...it will not only make this country more prosperous, but *faire*' alluding to some of the key characteristics of the TL informed Labour policy. Following the election, the government launched the GBP2,500,000,000 National Skills fund in 2020 to support young adults to reach their first level 3 qualification. Whilst stopping well short of the lifelong learning pledges advocated by the TL project it was a substantial investment in adult skills and learning. A former special educational adviser to ministers at the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills attributes this funding and policy to Duckworth's research, 'Duckworth's influence and impact on policymaking also extended to the Conservative Government and its announcement of a £3 billion adult skills fund' [E4].

Inspired by the LLC and subsequent political interventions a national campaign has launched calling for everyone to have a statutory right to learn irrespective of age or background. Duckworth was invited to be on the steering group of the campaign as it attempts to push government policy on adult skills and learning further [E9].

Providing an evidence base to save Guernsey College of Further Education from closure

The Transforming Lives project played an important role in shaping decision making relating to the future direction and indeed overall future of Guernsey College of Further Education. In 2017 Guernsey College was threatened with closure during a review of the island's education system. In response the college put forward a bid to expand their FE provision with increased investment from Government. This proposal drew on initial outcomes from the TL project to demonstrate the transformative benefits of FE. Further the research was used to present the transformative potential of FE and adult learning to key stakeholders and decision makers on the island. The bid and lobbying were successful and as a result provided the college with the means to remain open and offer further and higher education to over 3000 students across 15 vocational areas, as well as providing learning and development opportunities to the local community (E2). The principal of the college notes 'transforming lives project was an essential component in informing and influencing key stakeholders... as a result of the contribution of the transforming lives project and the evidence it provided I am pleased to say that the college remained open and as such there is now a widespread view that a comprehensive further education offer is essential for the community' [E2].

Providing a body of evidence to strengthen the Further Education sector

The evidence provided by the TL project has created a unique evidence base of the significance and importance of adult education to not only the learners themselves, but their families and wider communities. The evidence of impact on individual learners presented via multimedia case studies in particular online videos, has emboldened providers of further education to situate

themselves as critical community hubs and key cogs within the wider educational provision. Colleges in deprived areas have particularly benefitted, for example Glasgow Kelvin College serves some of the most deprived communities in Scotland. The former principal of the college and now chair of the Community Learning and Development Standards Council for Scotland (CLD) notes 'the use of video clips highlighting the positive impact which colleges have on the lives of learners and their communities has been welcomed. It encouraged staff to consider how best they could evidence such impact using this material to support self-evaluation activities and making greater use of learner feedback to inform actions for improvement' [E7]. Similarly, the Deputy Principal of the Newcastle College Group (Kidderminster) explains that they have presented the TL cases at several 'sector wide national meetings,' and the cases have 'provided the confidence to debate and fight for social justice' [E6].

The member led, Community Learning and Development Standards Council (CLD) is the professional body for people who work or volunteer in community learning and development in Scotland. The CLD, who comprise over 2500 members have utilised the findings from the TL project to stimulate the debate in Scotland across their membership and beyond, on progression routes from community-based learning to college provision. The CLD are using the TL evidence to try to influence the Lifelong Learning Strategy contained in the Scottish Government's Programme for Government. The Chair of the CLD notes 'the project is raising the transformational effect colleges and CLD have, and this has become much evident during the Covid-19 pandemic. As a consequence, there has been an opportunity to engage more purposely on the need to create a 21st century learning system which values all learning episodes' [E7].

Impact on Adult Education beyond the UK

Adult Learning Australia (ALA), a not-for-profit organisation representing adult and community education members from across the country have been influenced by the TL project and its outcomes. ALA considered running a similar project in 2020 and are using the work as a reference point in their 'lobbying of the Australian government for greater recognition of community-based adult learning' [E1].

The UNEVOC Network, UNESCO's global network for institutions specialized in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) have drawn on the methodology and findings from TL, to inform their own research, and to influence UNESCO to place emphasis on training's broader transformative potential in their policy advice. The UNESCO Chair International Education and Development confirms that the TL project is 'absolutely central to persuading international civil servants of the merits of a more transformative approach. Through this, Transforming Lives is impacting upon UNESCO's policy advice to member states' [E8].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 1) Factual Statement – Adult Learning Australia
- 2) Factual Statement – Principal, Guernsey College of Further Education
- 3) i) <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Lifelong-Learning-Report-2019.pdf>
Labour party lifelong learning report
ii) <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Real-Change-Labour-Manifesto-2019.pdf> - Labour party manifesto 2019 General Election
- 4) Factual statement former special adviser to ministers on education, skills and science policy at the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and current Specialist Advisor to the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee
- 5) Factual Statement – Chair of House of Commons Education Select Committee
- 6) Factual Statement – Deputy Principal of Newcastle College Group
- 7) Factual Statement - Chair, Standards Council Scotland
- 8) Factual Statement – UNESCO Chair in International Education and Development
- 9) Factual Statement – Head of AccessHE
- 10) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jiuFpC10ws> – Former Labour Leader addresses the research and subsequent campaign.