

Serial number	0126
Title	Hairdresser to university course programme leader: 3 case studies exploring the 'figured worlds' of realising professional goals and the role of flexible approaches and communities of practice within this.
Session	Transforming lives transforming places: Foundation degrees and their impact on mature female learners and their communities. (Bovill)
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Context

The *Transforming Lives* research centres on teaching assistant (TA) graduates at three English universities. Extended semi-structured individual face to face, Skype or telephone interviews with 21 participants provided data concerning their HE experiences. This data highlights instances of both supportive and obstructive networks that surround the learner in terms of family and friends, work and university and this paper seeks fuller understanding of the impact of these networks upon students realising their professional goals. The findings will be presented through the words of: Janet, hairdresser to university programme leader; Louisa, TA to teacher; Mikayla, hairdresser and HLTA still struggling to get on.

The role and professional development processes for TAs in the UK remains unstructured (Blatchford et al 2012). From 2000, the UK higher education (HE) sector responded to this complexity with Foundation degrees (FdAs), programmes designed for students employed in their field of study. The student body of TA FdAs continually represents elements of widening participation, with demographic characteristics of being largely female, mature and from non-traditional HE backgrounds (Bovill 2012 and Dunne et al 2008). These characteristics can lead to a sense of a lack of entitlement and a view of unmerited participation in HE and a host of personal back story which can limit learner confidence (Woolhouse et al, 2009) and present personal obstructions to learning journeys in the form of unsupportive work environments (Dunne et al 2008) and unsupportive family and friend structures (Waller et al 2011). This paper explores such obstructions through all of the three case study examples presented here.

Conversely the case studies also provide examples of resilience from participants to overcome challenging back stories and related obstacles, and also of highly supportive spheres of influence or communities of practice. There is real complexity in the women's lives reported here when exploring those participants who progress professionally and those that do not or become 'stuck' for a period of time. Flexible spheres of influence and supportive communities of practice seem to lie at the heart of more successful post-graduate transitions to realising professional goals.

Theoretical approach

This paper will draw upon socio-cultural theory to demonstrate the impact that social processes have upon learner identity formation and to further understand the processes playing out within these three women's lives. Particularly it will draw upon the identity work of Holland et al (1998) and Holland and Lave (2001) who explore 'figured worlds' and the ways in which people interact within the social organisation of various competing spheres and (sometimes) come to produce new identities for themselves. In doing this the familiar and strange contexts for the participants will come to the fore demonstrating the struggles at play in this for them, such as when the demands of family and professional progress clash.

The work of Biesta et al (2011) from the UK's largest co-ordinated education research initiative: Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) 'Learning Lives project', will be drawn upon to consider the impact of the under and post-graduate learning (and living whilst learning) processes. The case study participants all talk about the ways in which the various spheres of influence impact positively, negatively or neutrally, upon their learning journeys. This paper will draw upon aspects of the TLRP project to consider how this impacts upon the development of their 'learning horizons' or ways in which they imagine their futures. As with Biesta et al (2011: 100) data from this study finds that: 'dispositions together with positions (such as family...) can both enable and constrain' and that existing dispositions can be resistant to change.

This paper will also consider the impact of the development of 'communities of practice' within the various spheres of influence within the lives of the three women to further understand how these women participate as both marginal and core members of communities and 'try on' new professional identities for size. Exploration of Wenger's (1998) work on processes of induction into different communities and inculcation of the language, values and behaviours of the various communities will help to further understand the sometimes wavering professional progress displayed in the stories here. These women come to the various communities of practice (the university, their new friendship groups, their changing identities in the workplace) as 'novices' and also as dynamic actors and this interplay will be explored (Wenger 2009 and Wenger and Trayner 2015)

Findings

Themes to emerge from the data are:

1. Support and encouragement alongside struggle and resistance to reformation of new identities both from the women in the stories presented here and from the significant others within the spheres of influence.
2. Focussed determination and wavering indecision toward professional goals, sometimes an interplay of both at the same time in the stories told.
3. Strong structural support toward goals and weak, absent or even obstructive structural processes at play.

Recommendations are:

1. Flexible modes of under and postgraduate educational provision needs to remain.
2. Enabling some kind of mode to continue engagement with positive communities of practice after graduation that goes beyond most current alumni provision.

Policy and practice Impact:

1. National university policy to recognise alternative modes of delivery of learning such as FdA provision as valuable to the HE sector and not side-line this to Further Education (FE) provision.

2. Local university resource for FdAs needs to recognise the diversity of these students and resource adequately for the support of this.