

<b>Serial number</b>	0131
<b>Title</b>	Mind the gap: The role of emotions in the exchange of higher education qualifications into economic capital for teaching assistants on education related foundation degrees.
<b>Session</b>	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. Questionnaires were sent to 585 participants who had completed the Foundation Degree Educational Support (FdA) in each of the universities over the duration of the programmes and for who we continued to hold contact details. 129 were returned, this gave some data on professional advancement upon graduation and beyond. Extended semi-structured individual face to face, Skype or telephone interviews with 21 participants provided further data concerning their post-graduate professional trajectories. From the questionnaire data we identified that 66 respondents were still in the same job or level of role as before they started the FdA, 4 were out of education and 6 were not working for various reasons. For the purposes of this paper we will denote those total of 66 participants as having not yet professionally advanced. Alternatively 60 participants could be seen to have achieved or be achieving professional advancement, with 31 now teaching, 5 completing or about to start teacher education, 24 in another educational role outside of teaching but which would denote professional advancement, e.g. working in a leadership role in the local education authority. The research objectives to be explored here are:

1. Why some of the TAs have a gap or lapse in time before they move toward professional development more likely to result in economic gain.
2. The extent to which some TAs are able to exchange their educational qualifications for economic capital.
3. The role of emotions in this exchange.

This data seeks to extend the work of Woolhouse, Dunne and Goddard (2009) who explored TAs' experiences of the accumulation of new forms of economic, social and cultural capital. Similarly they conducted research with TAs who were on or had graduated from an FdA, they employed similar methods of a postal survey and case study life history interviews. As with Bovill (2012) and Waller, Pitt and Bovill (2011) their research: 'exposed the personal challenges and hidden 'costs' involved in vocationally driven lifelong learning' (Woolhouse et al 2009: 774). They found that whilst there were complex changes in the TAs' personal and professional identities related to shifts in their cultural and social capital, in terms of economic capital there was little change for many in their study and that 'only one-third of the graduates... had obtained promotion with its concomitant pay increases' (ibid: 768).

This paper seeks to further explore the complexities involved in exchanging educational qualifications for economic capital for the participants here of whom nearly half or 48% had obtained promotion or were advancing toward promotion through further post-graduate qualifications likely to lead to this. These figures are largely in line with HEFCE (2010: 49) findings which drew on DLHE data to consider FdA student trends and found that '43% of respondents in 2007-08 were employed in 'graduate' jobs'.

Foundation Degrees (FDs) were introduced in 2000 as part of the Government's drive to widen participation, they were designed for those in employment and seeking career development to: 'open up new career horizons' (HEFCE 2000: 5). Whilst a good proportion of participants were moving toward or establishing themselves in 'new career horizons' others continued to struggle and this paper will utilise theories of habitus and combine this with Archer's (2007 and 2008) reflexivity to more fully understand the complexities involved in the exchange of higher education qualifications for economic capital. The students in this study are predominantly mature, white British females who are often first in their family to go to university and who have entered university through non-traditional routes. The role of emotions in their decision making will be considered.

## Theoretical approach

Policy can have a tendency to position learners in higher education (HE) as: 'entirely responsible for (their) own choices' (Hey and Leathwood 2009 in Bovill 2012: 688). This is true of policy related to the development of FdAs (HEFCE 2000) and as noted by Woolhouse et al (2009: 765) FdAs: 'are framed as providing 'a passport to a job' and imply the promise of career development and professional enhancement'. However, it has been widely documented that students are not equally 'placed at the centre of the economic and social world' (Hey and Leathwood 2009, in Bovill 2012: 688) to shape their futures as they please. Archer's (2007, 2008) 'autonomous reflexive' is most in line with neo-liberal policy who envision students as: 'selective, evaluative and elective...' (Archer 2007: 193).

This paper seeks to combine the concepts of habitus: Our durable, unconscious predispositions shaping the way we interact with the world, with Archer's forms of reflexivity: the idea that we all engage in internal talk, and the way that we do this determines different courses of action or 'projects' through which we achieve our 'concerns', or the things we determine to care most about. This is in an attempt to gain a middle ground between seeing agents as powerless or as completely self-created. As with Vogler's (2016) exploration of habitus and Archer's theories of reflexivity this paper will examine the constant interplay of structure and agency and the power dimensions at play to more fully understand the ways in which participants negotiate this landscape or 'play a good game'. Vogler (ibid) criticises Archer's theories as over-emphasising the intentionality of action and downplaying the impact of structure whilst at the same time offering critique of the determinism of Bourdieu's habitus and the tendency to downplay the role of conscious thought. Important in this account of reflexivity and habitus is the role of emotions with Vogler considering that emotions are not a result of reflexivity rather the driver. This paper will consider the impact of emotions upon the decisions that students make about their professional advancement and the impact this can have upon their capacity to exchange educational qualifications for economic capital.