

'I always wanted to do second chance learning': Identities and experiences of tutors on Access to HE courses

Hugh Busher¹, Nalita James¹, Anna Piela²

1=Leicester University, Leicester, UK.

2= Leeds Trinity and All Saints University, Leeds, UK

Paper presented to the FERA Inaugural International Research conference held at 11-13 July 2014 at Harris Manchester College, Oxford University, Oxford, UK

Abstract (words 186)

Understanding tutors' biographies and constructions of identity in the social spaces of Access to Higher Education (AHE) courses helps to explain the cultures constructed with the participating mature students from socio-economically marginalised backgrounds on them. These students often have very low esteem of themselves as learners. The empirical qualitative data comes from research into AHE students' and tutors' views of their experiences on AHE courses which was collected in seven rural and urban AHE providing institutions in the East Midlands of England in 2012-2013. It was analysed using a grounded approach to reflect the emphases given in their interviews by participants. Emerging findings suggest that tutors' commitment to 'second chance learning' arose, in part from their own biographies and recognition of the disempowerment experienced by economically disadvantaged students who had often had negative experiences of schooling and/or a period of work before joining their AHE course. Tutors' sense of agency and identity and the cultures on AHE courses were negotiated each year through getting to know their students, meeting their students' extensive demands for support and contesting the institutional contexts in which the courses were located.

Key words:

Introduction to the context and the study (1305 words)

Access to Higher Education (AHE) is a one-year diploma qualification which is designed to prepare adult learners (older than 19 years) for study at university and is aimed at those 'excluded, delayed or otherwise deterred by a need to qualify for (university) entry in more conventional ways' (Parry 1996, 11). The first AHE courses were established in the 1970s mainly to encourage entry to teacher training by people from a wide range of social backgrounds. In 1987 AHE was recognised as 'the third route into HE' (Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), 2012) in addition to more conventional 'A' level routes. About 40,000 adults register on QAA-recognised AHE programmes each year of whom about 20,000 enter Higher Education Institutions (HEI) (QAA, 2013). AHE students, as mature applicants are seen as crucial for Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to meet the widening participation targets set for them by central government and which attract additional government funding to HEI (Hinsliff-Smith 2010).

AHE courses, often regarded as the 'Cinderella of the education system' (Franklin 2006, 1), have underpinned consecutive British governments' aims to redress educational exclusion among adult learners, widen participation and promote social inclusion (QAA, 2010). They attempt to redress the balance of educational disadvantage (Jones, 2006, 485) and help to attract 'second chance' learners (Fenge, 2011, 375) into Further Education (FE) colleges, which are the traditional sites in England and Wales for Lifelong learning and continuing education. These colleges are 'commonly regarded as at the centre of providing opportunities for lifelong learning, and a means of promoting economic growth and social cohesion' (Jephcote et al., 2008, 164) and are often perceived as a 'last chance saloon' for people who have under-achieved previously in education. Their cultures are said to be generally collaborative, acknowledging the needs of adult students in them (Jones, 2006).

However, the current (2014) British government emphasises the importance and value of education for developing an economy centred on knowledge and skills (BIS, 2010, 2012). It has prioritised the involvement of young people under 24 years old, in part to lessen the impact of high youth unemployment, rather than ensuring increased participation by those groups of people who are currently under-represented in higher education. This is portrayed in government discourses as 'fair access' to higher education which ensures 'that all those with the ability have access to higher education' (BIS, 2012, 4). It has been supported by significant changes to the FE funding system for students (BIS, 2010). Now, only young adults aged 19-24 years undertaking their first full level 2 or level 3 qualification (the latter equivalent to 'A' level in England) will be fully funded. Older (mature) students aged 24 years or over wishing to undertake level 3 courses, such as AHE courses, or higher qualifications can only apply for government backed loans (BIS 2010, 7) unless they choose to pay in full in advance. This policy discourse has drawn significant criticism from groups involved with work based, vocational and adult education who have argued that broader participation should be about providing second and third educational opportunities for adult learners who have been unable to benefit from the school system (Fenge, 2011). It has also brought about changes in the student

body, with more 19-24 year old students now attending AHE courses, in part due to changes in funding arrangements for mature students.

AHE courses act as sites of transition and transformation for their students' moving between their current identities as learners and their future identity trajectories (O'Donnell and Tobbell, 2007). AHE students appear to learn most effectively when they feel well supported (Jones, 2006) by tutors and by informal support structures amongst the student body. This appears to contribute significantly to students' individual successes and help to build confidence (Crossan et al., 2003). Dillon (2010) noted that black minority ethnic students on AHE courses welcomed supportive learning cultures to counteract their senses of social disadvantage. These cultures on AHE courses have been compared favourably with those on more 'anonymous' university course (Brine and Waller, 2004). The importance of such an environment perhaps, in part, reflects the tensions which many AHE students seem to face in balancing the different demands in their lives between supporting families, earning sufficient wages to live and undertaking a strenuous course of study which, in about nine months, brings their level of knowledge to the equivalent of a two year 'A' level course.

Tutors play an important part in constructing emotional and academic support, whether for AHE students or other adult learners (Crowther et al., 2010, Scanlon 2009, Jones 2006), by being available, approachable and able to understand students' various situations and needs. Existing research (Brooks, 2005, Towler et al., 2011) highlights the specificity of teaching in FE. However, to make sense of the relationships constructed between AHE students and their tutors it is important to understand the histories that tutors bring and the views of AHE students they hold since these influence the cultures of the learning communities the tutors construct in and beyond their classrooms with the students. These are not necessarily 'cohesive and homogenous social objects' (Handley et al., 2006, 642) as they are imbued with power and in-egalitarian relationships between students and tutors, in part imported from power-laden socio-economic policy contexts (Foucault, 1977).

This paper discusses the identities of tutors on AHE courses and their views of the students with whom they work and how these influence the culture and relationships of the communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1998) on AHE courses, drawing on the work of Shea and Bidjerano (2013), Leh (2002) and Gonsalves et al. (2011) amongst others to conceptualise what was found. Empirically, it draws on a study carried out in seven rural and urban providers of AHE courses, mainly Further Education (FE) Colleges, in the East Midlands of England and used a social interactionist framework (Lave and Wenger 1991) and linked case study design (Miles and Huberman 1994) to investigate the perspectives of mature adult students' and their tutors on the transitions and transformations that occurred for AHE students.

Students and their tutors were asked about why AHE students change their views on learning and themselves as learners during the AHE course; the nature and importance of the learning relationships constructed on AHE courses; and how AHE students' perceptions of AHE courses and Higher Education are affected by changing policy contexts. In addition, tutors were asked about what was involved in being an AHE tutor, and why they had chosen this career path. Trustworthiness in

the study was established through triangulation of method and participant perspectives to help construct a stable interpretation of events (Reed-Danahay 2005). Participants gave voluntary informed consent to participate and were aware they could leave the project at any time, which some chose to do.

Qualitative data was collected through focus group interviews with five to six self-selecting AHE students in each AHE providing institution. These were carried out on three occasions during the academic year (December, February/March and April/May). Individual interviews were carried out with their tutors twice during the same period, at the beginning and the end of the study. Each student focus group and individual tutor interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was digitally recorded, transcribed and analysed using a grounded approach (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) powered by NVivo to construct themes that reflected participants' own constructs of themselves and their contexts.

Quantitative data was collected by questionnaire from all AHE students in each providing institution in the study, but not from tutors. The biographical profile of the students that emerged was broadly in line with the national profile of AHE students (QAA, 2013). The themes that emerge from the study raise questions that need to be considered in other similar institutions and courses nationally, although the findings from the study are not immediately generalisable to other sites.

Making sense of being an AHE tutor (4298 words)

Institutional contexts of AHE tutors' work

Existing research (Brooks, 2005; Towler et al., 2011) highlights the specificity of teaching in FE, acknowledging its differences from secondary school and university teaching.

The institutional context in which AHE tutors work includes the classrooms where they encounter their students, college policies, teaching and learning practices, college cultures and course sub-cultures. It involves moral and political activity that constitute the managing, monitoring and resolving of value conflicts, where values are defined as concepts of the desirable (Hodgkinson, 1999). Resolving these conflicts ethically and transparently in keeping with previously established social and moral norms in an institution or community leads to greater social cohesion (MacBeath and MacDonald 2000) by constructing shared narratives or cultures. These cultures define the core practices, values and boundaries in and of a community (Wenger, 1998), such as a teaching group or institution, which occur in particular places / spaces at certain times (Busher et al., 2014).

Changing uses and demarcations of space through time in institutions reflect the changing relationships of people to each other and to the institution (Paechter, 2004). How people colonise the physical, online and organisational spaces they occupy, whether or not formally allocated to them by an institution, are part of the discourses about how they are constrained but try to assert their agency individually and collectively (Foucault, 1976 in Gordon 1980) to construct the small cultures (Holliday, 1999) of their work groups or communities within the broader constellation

(Wenger, 1998, Holliday, 1999) of an institution's culture. In the physical and online spaces of organisational cultures, referred to as interstitial spaces by Bhabha (1994) that are intertwined with power relationships, small cultures are negotiated by members of institutions to reflect and guide the values, relationships and practices that lie at the core of communities and institutions (Wenger, 1998) in particular socio-political contexts (Busher et al., 2014). One of these small cultures is that which emerges around AHE courses.

These cultures and policy discourses inform the choices of teaching, learning and institutional processes, making these choices a political act (Ball, 1987). They involve the use of power to assert some values or practices at a particular point in time in a particular situation to the exclusion of others. For example, decisions taken by AHE tutors about when work should be handed in excludes other times/ dates, although students may try to negotiate these. Further, decisions taken by tutors and students are not taken in isolation but are also scrutinised by the gaze (Foucault, 1977) of more senior members of a college's organisational hierarchy and of the Award Validating Authority (AVA) that awards the Diploma for the AHE course in different regions of England and Wales. Teachers and students have to comply with the values and choices projected by this evaluative gaze. Power and micro-political processes are used by institutional members to negotiate or enact particular policies and values within the contexts of institutional structures. The last are the reified outcomes of past power struggles (Busher et al., 2014).

The cultures constructed within AHE courses by tutors and students are made from a variety of different discourses: students emotional and learning needs; tutors needs as people and as employees of an institution; institutional discourses that reflect national discourses about education and institutional purposes projected by senior leaders in them. These cultures are not necessarily egalitarian but they are culturally dynamic, shifting as people within them negotiate with each other in pursuit of their own agenda both within the institution and outside it. Bhabha (1994 in Amoamo, 2011, 1255) emphasises 'the discontinuous nature of the location of emergent cultures/ethnicities or "third space cultures" where new identities and affinities are restlessly forming'. Bhabha (1994) described these as hybrid cultures which are made up of people with different 'resources (e.g., skills, dispositions, or practices)' (Gonsalves et al., 2011, 393) that people bring with them but which may or may not be valued by the people, such as tutors, who exert control over these communities which exist at the margins of already constructed social orders, such as colleges.

The dispersions and constructions of space and time in communities, as well as access to them, are conduits and sites of power (Foucault 1977) which privilege some people's engagement because of the micro-political processes of the community (Jurasaite-Harbison, 2009) or the resources they can access, such as familiarity with digital technology (Cook-Sather, 2006) as well as authority arising from their formal positions in an institution, such as teachers (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). When students begin a course, such as AHE, they are not passive in the new situations in which they find themselves but try to assert some agency, (Moran, 2013, 339). Agentic strategies include mimicry of dominant discourses (Bhabha, 1994) and recognition of others who have access to various resources or none (Amoamo, 2011) that help to reify social structures and how power flows

(Foucault, 1986) in them, including how institutional culture is negotiated and helps to construct power (Giddens, 1984).

Identity and agency: Being and becoming and AHE tutor

AHE tutors' identities may be to some extent essentialised (Easthorpe, 1998, Amoamo, 2011) as they are formally described as such and have a formal ascribed role in the hierarchy of an institution with particular responsibilities and authority (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) attached to it, but their identities are dynamic, not fixed as they develop their projects of the self (Giddens, 1991) and their sense of agency. These identities are constructed through discourses with other people individually and in groups and social structures, such as institutions and policy discourses (Kearney, 2003) and the intersectionality of class, gender and ethnicity that are reproduced by society (Chandra, 2012). 'Understandings of identity explore the ways in which the social, personal and cultural meet, the subsequent ways in which people are 'stitched into' social relations, how identities are made within this psycho-social nexus and the possible actions that flow from understanding one's place in a system of social relations' (Ecclestone, 2007, 121).

There are several different understandings of identity one of which refers to a person's sense of self as a unique individual. In part this is perceived as a person having unique characteristics, gender, ethnicity, social class, as well as certain personal characteristics. However, people are also reflexive about how they live in the world and relate to people and social structures around them. Through this process they engage actively with the world around them (Hammersley and Treseder, 2007) and develop their sense of agency for constructing chosen actions in the world within the contexts in which they find themselves. This notion of agency is further discussed below. Biographical experiences create forms of reflexivity that help people to shape their identities (Cieslik, 2006) through their constructions of the social worlds through which they move. Teachers talk at length about their experiences as students and how that has shaped their understandings of themselves as teachers, as well as talking about their interactions with others as important building blocks in developing their careers (Busher, 2005).

To avoid having only an essentialised or substantive self that does not alter through time, the self can be seen as being constructed through discourses about the self with itself (Archer, 2003) and with others and with the social structures around it (Ecclestone, 2007). Archer (2010) elaborates how processes of internal dialogue allow a person to develop a critical dialogue with itself that takes account of the changing contexts in which it finds itself. In so doing it creates a reflexive guide for action that alters through time while the self remains in control, rather than being controlled by external forces. She argues that:

reflexivity mediates between the objective structural and cultural contexts confronting agents, who activate their properties as constraints and enablements as they pursue reflexively defined 'projects' based on their concerns (Archer, 2010, 1).

The construction of identity is not just by conversational discourses by the self internally and externally with others but also through processes of action, performing its understandings of self in a variety of different contexts with a variety of different people to meet and resist socially reproduced understandings of what it means to be

a certain person or a person in a particular group or category (Butler in Nayak and Kehily, 2006). AHE tutors and students act out their understandings of what it means to be people in those situations and through doing so engage in a critical dialogue of action about what it means to perform those roles in particular socio-economic and policy contexts.

AHE tutors negotiate meanings of themselves and their actions with a variety of different constituencies, college authorities mediating a variety of internal and external policy discourses, colleagues with more authority in the college than they who control access to resources and means of evaluating practice, students in the multitudinity of their selves and their needs, and the various aspects of their lives outside the boundaries on the institution in which they work. If in not quite such an extreme situation as the Afghan women whom Rostami-Povey (2007) studied, who had to negotiate 'between social, political, economic, ethnic, cultural and gender spheres' (294), none the less AHE tutors invent different ways of coping with life inside and outside institutions to assert their identity and establish their agency.

For example, women's identities and actions are particularly shaped by powerful discourses of patriarchy in Damascus (Gallagher, 2007), some of which are to be found in Britain differentially in different social groups, as AHE students pointed out (Busher et al., 2014). This suggests that gender, and other personal attributes, are not fixed but fluid, being constructed through performances in different circumstances (Butler in Nayak and Kehily, 2006, Paechter, 2007). It can mean that, for example, gender will be performed differently in different circumstances, for instance at home and on an AHE courses, whether by tutors or students.

The construction of identities takes place within particular social contexts. Kearney (2003) discussed how the children of immigrant parents have to learn to negotiate identities that reflect both their heritages and their positions as citizens of a country different from that in which their parents grew up. Although referring specifically to Denmark, Jensen (2011) develops a much more broadly applicable point about how public discourses by the media among others help to construct identities of ethnic minorities that pathologise them, describing them implicitly or explicitly as savage or uncontrolled or deviant as opposed to the orderly or civilised norms of dominant social groups (Jensen, 2011, 65).

Discourses that place people as the other, be they students or social class or ethnic minority groups, are sometimes referred to as 'othering'. Developed by Spivak (1985) to describe identities that are imbued with power to indicate that some people or groups have less power / lower status than others – being subordinates or subalterns (Spivak, 1985) to dominant social groups, whether or not they make up the numerical majority of a population – Jensen (2011) suggests that these discourses place people in, 'specific subject positions, thereby achieving identity [that] is fundamentally gained in the gaze of the powerful' (66).

Hence othering concerns the consequences of racism, sexism, class (or a combination hereof) in terms of symbolic degradation as well as the processes of identity formation related to this degradation ... Such discursive processes affirm the legitimacy and superiority of the powerful and condition identity formation among the subordinate (Jensen, 2011, 66).

An important intention of othering is to allow powerful people who are constructing the discourses to reinforce their own senses of identity. Students are frequently constructed as subordinates in educational institutions (Gonsalves et al., 2011). Seeing who they are not, may be a way in which AHE tutors separate themselves from the mature adult students with whom they work. However there are powerful biographical forces of empathy at work among many AHE tutors, as is discussed later in this paper.

Closely linked to the notion of identity is that of agency, how people act in pursuit of particular chosen values and interests to develop themselves. People act autonomously in the intersectional (Chandri, 2012) and interstitial space (Bhabha, 1994) in which they find themselves with other people in whatever form being present or a presence that takes. For AHE tutors the other people will include their students. Moland (2011) suggests that people develop themselves, 'through interaction with other human beings and through recognizing them in various concrete ways ... [that allows her to] evaluate her desires in the light of the other human's desires' (371). This, Moland (2011) argues, helps people to develop ethical action that promotes individual freedom by nurturing people's individual interests while also recognising the needs of a wider society which gives a context for people's actions.

Incorporated within the notion of agency is also the notion of resistance, how people resist identities or practices bestowed up on them. Nayak and Kehily (2006, 462) took a Foucauldian view, arguing that where there was power there was resistance but this was not from a point exterior to the sources of power but rather depended on multiple points of resistance within the system, a view well illustrated in the study by (XXX 2002) of how girls in school constructed their identities to meet the different social demands on them in and out of school. There seem to be various ways of performing resistance, one of which is by people adapting or adopting aspects of the identity which is bestowed on them, preferring to see aspects of action that have been presented pejoratively as badges of pride (Jensen, 2011). Another way is through the use of mimicry (Bhabha, 1994), adapting the discourses of the dominant group but using them for the subordinates' own purposes. A third strategy would seem to be that of refusing to occupy the position of the other given by disempowering discourses (Jensen, 2011).

Agency and identity are interconnected as spatial phenomena. Identity is performed within certain spaces, such as the metaphorical spaces of AHE courses, the physical spaces of classrooms and other institutional settings, the online spaces where tutors post materials for students or engage with them in online exchanges, and telephonic spaces. Through these spaces people may be actually present with each other or present to each other virtually. There here-and-now and there-and-now collide (Zhao, 2006). People 'create, maintain and communicate a sense of meaning and self-worth through their use of space to create their own autonomous identities [and] to challenge externally imposed, stigmatized identities' (Gotham and Brumley, 2002, 268). Further people are constantly aware of the gaze of powerful others (Foucault, 1977) through particular institutional mechanisms or discourses of disempowerment that convey the inequalities that are reproduced in certain social situations. Different locations and spaces facilitate or hinder particular forms of social action. AHE tutors' work is closely bound up with that of enabling other people, their students to develop

themselves and transform their identities as learners within the contexts of their current societies.

Working with others: students and other people linked to AHE courses

Ecclestone (2007, 125) argues that, 'the ways in which adults construct a learning identity and engage with the relationships, norms and expectations of a particular learning community of practice makes it important to have a better understanding of the inter relationships between identity and learning for adult learners participating in work-based vocational education and training programmes. Identity is integral to learning and adult learners bring particular dispositions to workplace learning based on their previous experiences and biographies of learning'.

To work successfully with their students, AHE tutors have to understand how AHE students' identities are shaped by the discourses that surround them. As a considerable proportion of AHE students are likely to be women (QAA, 2013, Busher et al., 2014) many are likely to be shaped by particular discourses around gender that shape how women are expected to behave in particular circumstances whether seeking access to university or improving their, 'their access to income and employment that draw on and reinforce a collectively gendered sense of self that is central to the process of both obtaining resources and doing gender' (Gallagher 2007, 227). Some students also hold strong views about what constitutes 'proper' processes of teaching and learning (Gonsalves et al., 2011) which can inhibit how teachers construct learning opportunities unless tutors understand and engage with these views. If students are labelled by staff in educational institutions as subordinates, not as partners in constructing learning processes, then tutors, too, are identified and labelled by their institutions and their students as having particular roles and being stereotyped in certain ways (Leh, 2002). However dominant discourses of institutions and of examination boards are likely to shape what counts as knowledge and what counts as appropriate processes for teaching and learning and for tutors and students relating to each other (Gonsalves et al. 2011).

The learning communities constructed on AHE courses can be considered hybrid communities because of the way that they are constructed, the discourses of power that surround them, and the dynamism in them. Bhabha (1994) points out that hybrid communities are created where people live in interstitial or liminal spaces, betwixt and between many aspects of their lives – metaphorically between interrelated but different worlds – that have to be articulated in whatever social situations or geographical locations or spaces they find themselves. Liminality is a dramatic cultural phase where the new member gradually develops a more sophisticated understanding of a new institution in an effort to gain accepted membership of it. It is a phase of cultural initiation which has few or none of the attributes of a past or coming state. During this liminal stage, new members are caught between the intense engagement with other participants, the muted compliance tacitly expected of newcomers by other community members, and a lack of knowledge about how the system in the community. It is a disconcerting phase that challenges participants' work-related senses of identity (James and Busher, 2013, 197).

While Bhabha (1994) relates his discussions to the transitions and transformations of identity that take place when people migrate and how they respond to assert their agency in new situations, the argument can be applied figuratively to AHE students who 'migrate' from a working environment to an educational one, while often retaining engagement in both environments, as well as that of personal/ family relationships. Recognising that classes are hybrid learning communities shifts the way in which tutors approach their work with students in helping them to become familiar with the formal processes of their surroundings and the ways of working appropriate to the courses they are following.

'Providing students with clear course goals, topics, due dates, timely feedback and assisting them to collaborate in effective ways with their classmates allows them to develop productive interactions both with content and other students, which in turn advances joint knowledge construction' (Shea and Bidjerano, 2013, 368).

Perceiving classes as hybrid communities imbued with unequal power relationships, helps tutors to recognise that they have to welcome students as partners with their teachers in the processes of learning and teaching. It involves helping students identify 'the normative codes of practice that reveal the potential cracks in the structure of the system' (Gonsalves et al. 2011, 396). Where tutors take more instrumental approaches they risk being simply agents of institutions and dominant systems that try to fix students as subordinates in a system, a designation that some AHE students resent (Busher, et al., 2014).

People in new spaces, such as classrooms or colleges, often feel disoriented/ disempowered because they are unfamiliar with the culture, social structures and flows of power in them (Pierce, 2007). This tends to destabilise people's senses of identity, especially when new participants' cultural knowledge of practice and power in a school or classroom lacks sophistication compared with other members of it (Pierce, 2007). Helping people to understand the informal as well as the formal social processes through which people co-construct their professional or work-related identities (Jurasaitė-Harbisson, 2009) in particular institutional contexts helps to diminish this sense of disempowerment.

Informal social support was seen as important to the majority of users. 10 out of 14 [participants in the study] noted that they would ask a neighbouring friend for help if they had a problem with their computer, and 13 out of 14 would turn to the project initiators if they had a problem with their Internet connection' (Gaved and Mulholland, 2005, 7).

Informal learning can also take place through multimodal processes, although these are often constructed by participants to meet their perceived interests in some topic (James and Busher, 2013, 195-6).

For many students on AHE courses, returning to formal education involves a considerable risk because of their previous unsuccessful experiences of it or because of the views they held of themselves. They tend to be very under-confident about the value of the social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990) they bring with them to these courses.

It is a huge risk for marginalized youth to bring aspects of who they are out-of-school into a dominant structure that hasn't historically valued their ways of learning and knowing ... we must look at ways that the structure of schools and science education constrain this or might afford it (Gonsalves et al. 2011, 395).

Students on AHE courses are often unfamiliar with the nature of relationships in the colleges where the courses are taught and previously have had disenchanting experiences of education. Other factors such as age, gender and levels of cognitive knowledge especially of technology and the internet are likely to be important factors that affect participation in hybrid communities but teacher interactions with students can mediate the impact of age (Shea and Bidjerano, 2013). Students have to be inducted to appropriate modes of learning. It led one teacher to wonder if 'a traditional classroom provided the re-entry students with optimal learning conditions and if another educational delivery format might work better for them' (Leh, 2002, 32).

Getting to know students fully helps tutors to understand what social, cultural and learning repertoires they bring with them to AHE courses in order to help them develop as people and learn successfully.

Gonsalves et al. (2011) found that 'taking the time to learn the intricacies of the communities out of which [particular] students are coming is vital to creating a culturally responsive space that is not built upon pre-determined, deficit assumptions of what constitutes the cultural features of these communities' (391).

However, tutors also need to be aware that mature adult learners bring various resources/ repertoires with them from their lives outside the AHE courses. People bring various repertoires of practice, knowledge and language into new situations. People carry with them their histories and their previous constructions of identity (Chandra, 2012) into new situations. They also bring, 'transposable skills, such as solving mathematical problems, using statistics, estimating, and crafting an argument ... [so] there should be opportunities in science classrooms for students to use resources acquired in outside settings' (Gonsalves et al. 2011, 391).

One important aspect for tutors of working with students is listening to students' voices, their views on how learning can be carried out successfully with and for them in the particular socio-economic circumstances of the students' lives. Listening to students' perspectives can provide, 'opportunities for students' perspectives, opinions, and needs and resources to be foregrounded and used as 'starting points' for establishing student-centered (*sic*) research and pedagogy' (Gonsalves et al. 2011, 391).

In another case, that is deeply relevant to the interstitial lives of AHE students, students on a course welcomed hybrid online/offline courses that enabled them to manage more successfully their complicated lives. 'Flexible schedule, being able to work at any time and at any place, and being able to choose the best conditions for learning. They also mentioned that hybrid courses saved them gas and time on

commuting, and allowed them more access to instructor and to their fellow classmates' (Leh, 2002, 36).

Listening to students' voices also allows tutors to find out what aspects of a course students find worrying and where they think they need extra help or support. This is as important on face-to-face courses as on hybrid online/offline courses where, in addition, 'students with low technology skills' might feel 'pressured and anxious' which may, 'create a negative impact on learning' (Leh, 2002, 36).

At an instrumental level, this helps students to cope with the complexities of spaces on AHE courses which involve work and working spaces that are face to face and supported by VLE and other online resources. Tutors in the study on which this paper is based had contact with students telephonically and by email as well as face to face (Busher, et al., 2014).

More importantly, it helps students to assert their agency, transforming their identities to become more independent learners and take greater control of their lives. In one study, '[students] asserted themselves as community science experts in ways that took up and broke down the contradictory roles of being a producer and a critic of science/education ... appropriating project activities and tools in order to challenge the types of roles ... traditionally available [to students]' (Barton & Tan, 2010, 187).

Recognising student diversity also helps students to assert their agency (Changa, Chenb and Li, 2008) by taking account of their different skills and knowledge as well as their different needs to use time in various ways to address the different aspects of their busy lives in difficult economic times. This can take the form of tutors allowing different approaches to particular pieces of coursework as well as allowing students to negotiate timetables for completing course work.

However, as in the Opening Doors project (Busher et al., 2014), Leh (2002) found that tutors, 'experienced tremendous pressure in responding to students' messages and of their expectations of receiving responses instantly. Meeting students once a week in a traditional course became meeting students 24 hours a day, seven days a week online (36).

What the tutors in the AHE study were saying [8780 words unpruned]

Three main themes have emerged from the data generated by AHE tutors: a) being and becoming tutors on AHE; b) tutors' perceptions of AHE students and their transitions; c) tutors' perceptions /experience of AHE in institutional contexts

a) being and becoming tutors on AHE

Biographies of the Access tutors ... influence their sense of self ... some themselves returned to education after a long break, sometimes through Access to HE courses.

I was an Access student myself after eleven years of working in factories and then I did a degree and then I did a Masters degree in narrative writing. And then somebody asked me if I would like to teach a little evening class in creative writing for the Council and I thought that sounded fun. So I did that and then the Council said, 'Will you do an initial teacher training course?' And I said, 'Yes if you pay'. They said, 'We'll pay'. So I did that and came to [College 7] to do that and then somebody said, 'Do you teach English?' I said, 'Well sort of'. And they said, 'Our GCSE tutor's just quit. Will you teach her class?' I said, 'Well I suppose so', and never left (Tutor Coll 7)

I left school at sixteen and worked. Then I went to London, you know, as you do sometimes and I'd lived there for years and I had various enjoyable but not particularly well-paid jobs. And it was only when I was in my late twenties that I came back into education and I moved back up here. I did a photography course in FE, City and Guilds, and then I did an NVQ. Then I went to university and then came back and did the 7307 and then PCGE. So it's a long convoluted route (Tutor Coll 3)

I started work in the Trustee Savings Bank as a young girl and went on to do different jobs and then I just decided I was going to go back to school and do A-levels. Did an Open University Course to get my degree whilst I was working here. I came as a volunteer to work with people with learning difficulties. That's my base if you like...And then I've been a mature student. (Tutor Coll 1)

Becoming an AHE tutor by accident ... dialogues with social structures and selves ...

I started off teaching Biology as a secondary school teacher and a little bit of FE. When my children came along I ran a play group and from there went into teaching nursery and infant children. Did a primary conversion course to become a primary teacher. In primary for a little while, while my children were small because they're a bit spread out, and then somebody rang me up from the local FE college who had got hold of my CV which of course had got biology on it. So they said, 'Can you come and teach biology?' I said, 'No. I haven't taught it for seventeen years. That's ridiculous.' They said, 'Oh it'll come back'. So I went back to teaching biology at an FE college just at the time they were just launching Access to Nursing, which was a new concept then. So someone said to me, 'Could you teach the biology?' 'Yeah. Probably.' (Tutor Coll 5)

Preferring to teach adults ... they often highlighted that they either had always wished to teach adults, or they found they really enjoyed teaching adults when they were offered such an opportunity.

I teach in this area because I like teaching adults ... I was offered work doing taster sessions for children from a high school and it was a horrific experience for me and sort of cemented the fact that I love our learners (Tutor Coll 7)

I've taught younger students, you know, and it's sort of okay. You get fond of them in the end like you get fond of your pets, but it's not the same thing, and I just love teaching adults. I've got a love-hate relationship with this job. The bit I love is the teaching and the students (Tutor Coll 2)

I enjoy teaching mature students that want to be here. I couldn't be bothered with those little children that didn't want to be here anyway ... most of our Access students come with baggage and I really like supporting them and encouraging them and helping them to get on (Tutor Coll 2)

... younger v. older students on Access courses ...

So nineteen year olds tend to be less understanding, less committed because they don't want it as badly. People in their twenties and thirties want this badly. They see this as their last chance. Nineteen year olds ... tend sometimes to have less responsibilities maybe than the older people and the older people therefore cope with the course. Nineteen year olds, they don't want to get up in the morning, they don't come. A mother or single parent's got to get up ... I think sometimes get quite impatient because [Nineteen year olds] talk. They're on their phones sometimes. It's not all of them (Tutor Coll 5)

some of them who are around twenty-one have been to school and have not fitted in with that more school environment and they got on very well [here]. But one or two others ... they're just nineteen, often they're still in the mind-set of not really ... changing the way they view things. They can't be bothered, you know, 'Oh work's got to go in', suddenly they're off. It's not that many actually. And if we do get students like that, they tend to go by half-term, by now. (Tutor Coll 5)

.... differences between AHE students and A Level students.

A student [from] last year [came in] just to let us know how she was getting on at university. We do occasionally get with Access students, but it's very rare to find an ex-A-level student dropping in and just asking to chat to you because the relationship is quite different (Tutor Coll 5)

but compared to the A-level students, who half are there just because, 'My mum says I've got to be' (Tutor Coll 1)

you've perhaps seen the difference there which is a huge number of sixteen-seventeen year olds, the vast majority of classes, and some of the students find that a bit overwhelming. It is. It can be incredibly noisy and boisterous at times there, whereas here, go to the HE Lounge downstairs, it's much [calmer]. The atmosphere is different and also the classes are all [smaller?] generally. (Tutor Coll 5)

Those Access people, they do in one year of study, the same effectively as the kids do with two years of A-level study, but on top of that, the Access students, they have homes to look after usually. They have other jobs they have to go to. They have very little social life. They are so committed, (Tutor Coll 1)

AHE courses prepare students for entry to HE contains elements of research, referencing, and, an independent approach to learning

[AHE courses] To prepare people for university, but that includes being, you know, properly independent learners and researchers. Our submissions policy for assignments is hard-copy assignments through the ... If an assignment is going to be late they have to download an extenuating

circumstances form from the internet, borrowed from a University's freely available copy. And we are really almost sort of, ferociously in the early days, straight with them about what they are required to do and the way things need to be and we really, really don't mess about. We have a stepping-stone course for those people who aren't as confident and that's grown from strength to strength. (Tutor Coll 2)

... Access as an 'HE-type' course ... different from A-levels

And our standards are very, very high, you know so our students are often working at university level anyway, albeit on paper a level three programme, those that are capable of doing (Tutor Coll X)

I think that A-levels are not for everybody and ... I don't like the way they're delivered ... and examined ... And I also believe ... that Access is the best way to train somebody for university because I think the Access Programme is more, the way in which it's delivered, the way in which it is assessed, is much more like university than A-levels ever would be (Tutor Coll X)

Celebrating AHE ... a socially just course ... importance often not visible ...

I didn't know until a few years ago that actually [Tutor] had come as an Access learner and that's how he's come to teach on it really. I lived in Edinburgh for quite some time. My sister-in-law did an Access Programme and went on to do the same degree that I did. And one of her friends had suggested that she do that and she's now a professor, Head of Social Work at Edinburgh University and she came from an Access Programme. So I think that you can never underestimate how far-reaching this is for people and for the country as a whole because these people are in good positions doing fantastic jobs that we wouldn't have had, had it not have been for the Access Programme giving them the leg-up they needed (Tutor Coll 2)

It [Access] increases [students'] self-esteem and their ability to get a job that they really enjoy and to have an aspect of their life which they would never have had (Tutor Coll 2).

... as a 'second chance' for individuals who had much potential but had not capitalised on it earlier in their lives

this course is ... a second chance for people and if the Access Course didn't exist, and you know, as things have got more and more difficult for people who want to go on Access Courses, you know, that is really why I feel quite passionate about it because it is, for me, the only second chance option for adult learners who've been out of education, for them to jump into. And we know from teaching on A-level courses, it's really, really, really hard to do it that way. Access nurtures people in the right way. (Tutor Coll 7)

it doesn't matter what you've done in the past ... you can change your life to what you want to be, which obviously in the past you might have made one error and it shouldn't exclude you from anything (Tutor Coll 1)

It gives students an opportunity ... so I give the students the credit because they do the hard work ... if this wasn't here, so much talent would

go to waste. We get to meet people who are quite amazing people don't we on a daily basis (Tutor Coll 1)

... for students with weak educational backgrounds ... the risks students take ...

We've had quite a few students that have not got the grades at school for various reasons and then they've come back and they are in a position to work and they are capable, but if they haven't got the initial qualifications, then they're losing out and we've had some fantastic students come through (Tutor Coll 3)

It's hard enough to come back into education and do something that you thought you'd never be able to do or you were told at school you were thick. We get a lot of undiagnosed dyslexics who find out they are dyslexic when they get to us because we test them. And they go "ah, that explains a lot" (Tutor Coll 7)

The negative educational experience... In the schools maybe they thought that they were thick because they couldn't cope with school and were badly taught, or they were being bullied, or they had learning problems that were never picked up on. So they come to college thinking they can't do it. ... And families that think that. ... No support at home (Tutor Coll 1)

... for students with various major social difficulties...

[We had] an Access student [who] was homeless. He'd been inside. He was an alcoholic. He was on drugs etc., etc. He ... did Access, won an award and he had to go the House of Lords [to collect it]... one of his children was ... excluded from school basically... Because even though he'd been homeless and everything, he had a family. The boy then came to live with him and he's studying for his exams. He's studying for his exams because Dad was sitting down and his Dad was doing his work. So it wasn't only him succeeding, but his family was actually changing. So that supported him in succeeding (Tutor Coll 1)

Well one student ... She'd got really low esteem, quite a traumatic background, and came to us initially just to do basic skills and suffered... She suffered depression didn't she and initially it was a case of if she was going through a bad period, as and when she could come to lessons, and she started off just getting her maths and her English basic skills and moved on from there. Fantastic. She's really achieved and it's changed lots of things about her hasn't it? (Tutor Coll 3)

... for low social status students ...

They provide an opportunity for people to change their lives. We see that from our students. They come from very poor educational backgrounds. Perhaps low-level jobs and they become midwives, and lawyers, and psychology professors, and teachers, and nutritionists. Incredible careers ahead of them through doing this course which back when they were at school they would never had envisaged or imagined. So what the course does is pretty amazing actually for our students and what they're able to achieve (Tutor Coll 1)

The tutors expressed professional pride in seeing the striking progress made by many students:

I met up with one only recently who was one of my first group on the Access Course who is now an occupational therapist and loving it and just wanted to thank me for how Access had changed her life. She was here at the University ... bringing her daughter to do a psychology degree. So over time there was a daughter doing a degree (Tutor Coll 2)

Last year we nominated a student [who] came runner-up as Learner of the Year and she had had huge problems ... but just to be at the event and see the other people there ... all being nominated for their different stories. And seeing our students' reaction to it was wonderful... (Tutor Coll 1)

She's got three children. Her husband left her and she's gone to Nottingham University English and Classics. Now that's phenomenal. To me that's a phenomenal achievement (Tutor Coll X)

Being a tutor ... role was not limited to just teaching ... supportive attitude to students with a wide range of problems was widely recognised and appreciated by students across the colleges.

It's about where you're at and whether you're capable of working with us. If they work with us, if they come, if they attend, if they attempt the assignments, we will get them through. What happens is they miss because they're ill or their children are ill. Or they have to work (Tutor Coll 7)

I had students, April, May time who just said, "I'm not finishing". "I can't do it, I'm too far behind". "Yes you can, it's May, of course you can". But no. And my persuasive skills are very good but there were some of them who just would say they'd do it. So we'd say do an action plan, do this assignment over the weekend and bring it in on Monday ... Because my argument is, you've got to here, if you don't do this now you are no further forward than you were before (Tutor Coll 7)

I've had three on [benefits] the last week who've come to me with problems because they're on Job Seekers Allowance... where they have to be actively seeking work and be prepared to take a job if it's offered, and yet as they're here on sixteen hours course for a year, the expectation is they're going to be here ... to go on to university (Tutor Coll 6)

Working in hybrid communities ... working together with students ... a different style from working with younger students ... students as partners ... constructing collaborative cultures (see *also students' views*) ... related to respect for students, the baggage they bring with them and the efforts students are making to be successful (see *earlier* on tutors' views of students)

I feel with the majority of the students it is very much like that. Much more sort of equal. I always say to them, 'We're learning from each other' (Tutor Coll 5)

I'm sure it does, because if they miss a session, they've got to have someone who's going to say where were you when you come in. 'Here are the notes', you know, so you've got to make those social connections in every group as opposed to one group. It certainly does (Tutor Coll 2)

I love teaching adults because they are much more malleable ... are here for us to tell them stuff that they like to listen to and to fill their head full of things that they want ... We don't really get behavioural problems. (Tutor Coll 7)

[Peer support] Our first year was very supportive wasn't it because we met up with some a year or so ago didn't we? ... And they were still in contact with one another on a fairly regular basis and were still supporting one another (Tutor Coll 3)

But tutors exercise control/ projecting power over students using social structures and legitimate authority

We get to know the people who are, 'What do I do about?', kind of persons or the ones who say, 'But you've changed my room'. Shame. That's the way it happened. So you get to know some. There's a sort of spectrum. You get to know the ones who are struggling and the ones who need reassurance earlier than you do the others. So we're now starting to monitor attendance. So that's when we'll be picking up the ones who are a bit erratic who need (Tutor Coll 2)

Christmas is a bad time because quite a lot of people take on extra shifts because they need the money because they want to buy their kids presents, those kinds of things. So we have an attendance issue around Christmas. But if we can get them to come and stick with us, they will do it (Tutor Coll 7)

... See also views from tutor in Coll 5 and Coll 6

Dark side of Access ... demands which students made on their tutors – working all hours ... see student data (College 3, in particular) about contacting tutors and support they received from them

Funnily enough, our staff development session is today about mental health. One of our big issues is mental health and that's one of the things that we're saying about increasing the number of Facebook and other social media groups. So I think one of the things we need to look at is how we can facilitate that (Tutor Coll 2)

It is a rewarding job... Extremely rewarding... It's hard work and it's very stressful, very demanding, but the rewards are [that] at the end of the year you can see such a change in the students. ... It's a very rewarding part of the job definitely ... It's the most fun I've ever had and still got paid ... You meet so many different people with such different lives (Tutor Coll 1)

b) tutors' perceptions of AHE students and their transitions

knowing their students' histories and biographies - recognising intersectionality – see also earlier on social status of students & below on gender

They are such a cross-section. We have a lot of students who are younger and perhaps didn't do as well at A-level. We have students who are doing GCSE. Sometimes they're older. You have a lot of students who left school at sixteen and had a child. So they're bringing up a child. We've even had a few students that have already got a degree in something else and want to perhaps go into teaching (Tutor Coll 6)

they've got so many what we would call risk factors in terms of health, family circumstances, maybe low self-esteem, quite often mental health issues as well as ordinary health issues, complex families, caring responsibilities, financial problems, trying to keep the wolf from the door as well as do their Access Course, and caring for family, for older people, you know, whatever. They have complicated lives (Tutor Coll 7)

Victims of war and conflict in other countries, which we've seen for the last ten years ... Two years ago I had an ex-Congolese boy soldier who was in my class. He's now at Lincoln studying Education and he couldn't even go the first year because he was threatened with deportation. So they're big issues (Tutor Coll 6)

They seem to think or hope that by doing psychology, they'll either learn or experience something which is going to reduce their problems and it's not the case ... many of them have emotional problems [and] relationship problems, let alone other learning difficulties and barriers to learning (Tutor Coll 1).

Financial problems facing students....

I've had three on [benefits] the last week who've come to me with problems because they're on Job Seekers Allowance... they have to be actively seeking work and be prepared to take a job if it's offered, and yet they're here on sixteen hours course for a year. the employment service can get very heavy with them (Tutor Coll 6)

These people have got no money. No money to eat, no money to ... Yet they are still ploughing on, trying to keep going. Because they can see if they can get over this particular problem, get into university and get a bit of money through student finance, they can hopefully get a better job then they'll be alright. Whereas others end up leaving because they can't finance it (Tutor Coll 7)

Causes a lot of pressure ... [students have] this constant sort of contradiction between having to be here and having to be at work ... a vicious circle. They have to have a job in order to fund being a student, but sometimes if their work calls on them, they can't go to college because they're at work (Tutor Coll 6)

And most of them live, you know, they live in a flat or a house or whatever and then pay rents, mortgages, unlike the youngsters you see (Tutor Coll 6)

Gender issues ... patriarchy and the construction of gender... agency and the assertion of voice ... *cf students' accounts especially college 4*

I find a lot of my students, for some reason they're mainly female ... have a sort of gap period between leaving school before sixth form age to raise children ... They've perhaps had a poor or negative attitude to secondary

education anyway and that they come back to it realising, 'Okay. Now I'm older and wiser I've got more chance to actually not only get a job, but more interest in education, in the subject itself' (Tutor Coll 1)

Yeah. You can ... see a pattern both in terms of childcare and in finance sometimes. That they need some kind of support. Sometimes they've got a partner who's working which is a big help. Other times they've got parents. It's the ones that are on their own ... have had real problems with in particular childcare ... do tend to struggle don't they (Tutor Coll 6)

Well she was 53 years old when she came back into Access for a start. She'd always, when she left school at 15, fell straight into a job. Thought she was thick. Her father had told her she was thick when she was at school. Had been married for however many years. Had five children. Lived on a house-boat. Had a variety of jobs (Tutor Coll 1)

Break up marriages. It brings out insecurities in the partner. ... the little woman is now finding her voice and finding her confidence and got a whole life outside of her marriage and some blokes are very threatened by it and can't cope with it. Either they will give in and quit because ... husband or they'll leave him. It has caused problems (Tutor Coll 1)

c) tutors' perceptions /experience of AHE in institutional contexts

What we do ... Institutional contexts ... essentialised identities

I'm the Coordinator of Access to HE. I teach history on Access ... I've been here about nine years. [Curriculum Coordinator] delegates and I help organise interviewing, screening processes and admin side of it. (Tutor Coll 1)

I'm a Psychology Lecturer. I don't have any other role in the management or leadership of the Access Team, mainly because I'm trying to wind down because I'm past retirement age. I've been doing Access since 1997. I've had about one year off when I was doing pure A-level. I'm also a Centre Lead Moderator for Aim Awards. (Tutor Coll 1)

I teach English Literature and Study Skills. I've been here for about nine years and I am the [Bulb], which is a different centre, Coordinator. I do one day a week in [Bulb] (Tutor Coll 1)

I do core English ... I do Study Skills on Access and in the past I've done other things on Access. I was actually here back in '97 when Access first started here (Tutor Coll 1)

Access tutors saw themselves as a mostly separate, discrete group within the college, partly due to a specific character of teaching on Access, and, sometimes, due to spatial separation from the main college site

'I think it's more the Access Course than the location. I don't think we necessarily look at ourselves as working in a college. We work on the Access Course and we see ourselves as separate to the rest of the college rightly or wrongly' (Tutor Coll 7)

At times we almost feel like we're separated from [The College]. We feel like it's us really because the links between us and the Access Programme and the wider college I think aren't as well defined as they could be (Tutor Coll 5)

... location in college for AHE courses...

We're a hybrid in many ways. We've kind of been put in the A-level team. There's talk about us moving into the higher education [department] from next September and therefore Access to Higher Education would be quite a nice seamless link. At the moment downstairs there's the Higher Education Common Room. Our students now go in there from this year. They can now actually access those facilities and I know a lot of us would like to see that, more of a sort of coherent [department] academy. (Tutor Coll 5)

... geographies of marginalisation of Access courses

We've actually lost our students base room where we did most of our teaching ... our students are all over the place. There is nowhere at the moment for [Tutor #1] to keep students' folders. We've lost that facility. We used to have a small room. That's gone. The Access sense of identity, we're keeping it together (...), the tutors, but the ... infrastructure's, appalling this year. A couple of my students today, you know, said, 'We're a prestigious course. Why are we being treated as though we're not?' (Tutor Coll 5)

I think the issue is because I'm here. The Location is a major, major problem. If I was in my line manager's face every day I think it would be different. I can't walk along the college and knock on their door and say "I need help" can I? I email, I ring. Occasionally she gets back to me, she doesn't always. It's not because she's not doing anything, it is just because I'm out of sight and out of mind and sometimes that's quite useful [laughs]. Sometimes it's quite nice to be out of sight out of mind. Sometimes you just need someone. They can't pitch in can they? Normally if you...if I was, supposing I'd got 3 staff off, my line manager then would have pitched in. Said "right, I'll do this, you do that". There's no chance of that, she isn't here (Tutor Coll 5)

... limited funding for Access courses

No there's not the funding support, there is the support services, there is counselling. Those kinds of things when it's got to that point. And there are emergency systems when somebody is really, really struggling. But that's the [college]'s choice itself to do that. But those are few and far between. It's a struggle. Some of them you never know how much they struggle until the end when they say, well actually this is my story. (Tutor Coll 2)

Some tutors talked about a good experience of working with college management, especially as many Access students contributed to the college income through their tuition fee.

I think that generally speaking they are supportive of it as a route into education ... The [institution] itself is very supportive of Access. We have an award [ceremony] every year and we have the [Deputy Head of Institution] come to give certificates and he has a photo with each

student. That type of thing. So they are very supportive of us in general. They understand it but when push comes to shove it is about money. That is the problem. No matter how much you say actually this is a really good course, yeah but if retention isn't good it affects your Ofsted grade, because we are part of Ofsted, and it doesn't make you popular with people (Tutor Coll 2)

Fear of failure: the performative screw

We've also got Ofsted coming in and I've put it on record with [Tutor #2] who's head of HR, that we will be hauled over the coals because they will say, 'Well why haven't you got this in this room or why haven't you got that?' And the reason will be because it's not our room. We're going into somebody else's room. (Tutor Coll 5)

... anxiety relating to recruitment and retention rates ...

Tutors' ability to give extensive pastoral support to students was crucial in the efforts to maintain good retention rates, as very often tutors were able to convince students who had good academic potential but low self-confidence levels, or, perhaps, family or financial problems, to stay and continue their study.

Because my argument is, you've got to here, if you don't do this now you are no further forward than you were before. The door is still closed. If you do this, you've got the qualification even if you decide not to do a degree, you've got a qualification. Otherwise it's always on your CV that you started, didn't finish. Normally that's enough to say if you think I can do it, I'll do it. Just go and do this one assignment and we'll tick it off. You know, the pile will get smaller. By May the pile is not going to get any bigger, the pile will get smaller. But, last year I couldn't crack them at all. There was nothing, no light, no light [laughs] (Tutor Coll 7)

... some tutors suggested that the new entry requirements of GCSE English and Maths may put off potential students without any qualifications, including mature students, from applying:

'[Access] is designed to, as we always have done, take people with no qualifications sometimes and coach them to achieve' (Tutor Coll X)

So if you look at the stats, because again we get questioned on this, people say yeah but wouldn't you be better to ask for GCSE, and I say it makes no difference, not a scrap of difference to whether they stay in the course or not (Tutor Coll 7)

... a minority of tutors suggested that introduction of the GCSE requirement has increased the retention rates

'having that requirement has actually upped our success rate. It's actually helped our retention and it's helped to get the right student' (Tutor Coll X)

... tutors concern at the attitudes of local universities to AHE courses

[A] University wants to go to online applications for everything. I've put my foot down and said, 'No. I want a hand-written application because that shows how they write it and what they put in it.' It's a real good indication of what their literacy skills are like. We do a literacy test and we do this written task (Tutor Coll 2).

When I started Access it was either pass or fail assignments. The last few years it's pass, merit, distinction, and they clearly see the differences. Now some universities will just say a pass on different courses. Others might ask for merits. Some of the Russell Group, like Leicester, I know this, and Nottingham, they will ask for all distinctions. So they can see how there's a differentiation in what they have to do for their assignments, but I think as well in the experience you give them in the classroom, as I've just said to you earlier, I try and make it... I'm getting them to do a lot of their own work. This morning we did feedback. I got them into groups like they might well do at university in a seminar presentation. So they're starting to get the feel for what university is like (Tutor Coll 2)

Discussion and Conclusions

Acknowledgement

Beth Suthill and Anna-Marie Palmer, as research interns, gave valuable assistance in the development of this project

Reference Section - Incomplete

Brooks, 2005;
Towler et al., 2011)

Amoamo, M. (2011) Tourism and Hybridity: Revisiting Bhabha's third space. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38 (4) 1254–1273

Archer, M. (2003) *Structure, agency and the internal conversation* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Archer, M. (2010) Reflexivity© ISA (Editorial Arrangement of sociopedia.isa pp.1-13

*Ash. D., Brown, C., Hunter, L., and Kluger-Bell, B. (2009) Creating hybrid communities using inquiry as professional development for college science faculty. *Journal of College Science Teaching* 38 (6)

- Barton, A.C. & Tan, E. (2010) We Be Burnin'! Agency, Identity, and Science Learning, *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 19 (2) 187-229
- Bhabha, H. (1994) *The location of culture*. London: Routledge
- BIS (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills). (2010) *Further Education – New Horizon: Investing in Sustainable Growth* (Crown Copyright). <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/s/10-1272-strategy-investing-in-skills-for-sustainable-growth.pdf> [Accessed 4 April 2014]
- BIS (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills). (2012) *Government Response to 'Students at the Heart of the System' and 'A New Regulatory Framework for the HE sector'* (Crown Copyright). <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/g/12-890-government-response-students-and-regulatory-framework-higher-education> [Accessed 4 April 2014]
- *Bourdieu and Passeron, (1977)
- Brine, J., and Waller, R. (2004) Working Class Women on an Access Course: Risk, Opportunity and (Re)constructing Identities. *Gender and Education* 16 (1) 97-113
- Busher, H. (2005) The project of the other: Developing inclusive learning communities in schools *Oxford Review of Education* 31: 459–477.
- *Busher, H. James, N. Piela, A. Palmer, A-M (in press, 2014) Transforming marginalised adult learners' views themselves: Access courses in England. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 35 ...
- Chandra, P. (2012) Marxism, Homi Bhabha and the Omissions of Postcolonial Theory: Critique. *Journal of Socialist Theory*, 40 (2) 199-214
- Changa, C.K., Chenb, G.D. and Li, L.Y. (2008) Constructing a community of practice to improve coursework activity *Computers & Education Volume* 50 (1) 235-247
- Cieslik, M. (2006) Reflexivity, Learning Identities and Adult Basic Skills in the United Kingdom. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27 (2) 237-250.
- *Cook-Sather 2006
- Corbin, J., and Strauss, A. (2008) *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory 3rd ed.* Los Angeles, Calif. & London: Sage.
- Crossan, B., J. Field, J. Gallacher, and B. Merrill. (2003) Understanding Participation in Learning for Non-traditional Adult Learners: Learning Careers and the Construction of Learning Identities. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 24 (1) 55-67.
- Crowther, J., K. Maclachan, and L.Tett. (2010) Adult Literacy, Learning Identities and Pedagogic Practice. *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 29 (6) 651-664.
- Dillon, J. (2010) Black Minority Ethnic Students' Journeys to Higher Education: Realisable or Thwarted Ambitions? *The International Journal of Learning* 17 (2) 219-231.
- Easthorpe, A. (1998) Homi Bhabha, hybridity and identity, or Derrida versus Lacan. *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* (HJEAS), 4 (1/2) [Part 1] 145-151
- Ecclestone, K. (2007) An identity crisis? Using concepts of 'identity', 'agency' and 'structure' in the education of adults: Editorial *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 39 (2) 121-131
- Fenge, L.A. (2011) 'A Second Chance at Learning but Its not quite Higher Education': Experience of a Foundation Degree. *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 35 (3) 375-390
- Franklin, M. (2006) Wider Participation – Narrow Horizons: Status Hierarchy and Inequalities of Access to Higher Education. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning* 8 (1) 1-4.

- Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan, London: Allen Lane
- Gallagher, S. K. (2007) Agency, Resources, and Identity: Lower-Income Women's Experiences in Damascus. *Gender and Society*, 21 (2) 227-249
- Gaved, M. and Mulholland, P. (2005) Grassroots Initiated Networked Communities: A Study of Hybrid Physical/ Virtual Communities. *Proceedings of the 38th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS-38)*, Hawaii, 2005.
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, A. (1984) *The Constitution of Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gonsalves, A., Seiler, G. and Salter, D.E. (2011) Rethinking resources and hybridity *Cultural Studies of Science Education* 6:389–399
- Gotham, K.F. and Brumley, K. (2002) Using Space: Agency and Identity in a Public-Housing Development *City & Community* 1 (3) 267-290
- Gray, B. (2006) Curious Hybridities, *Irish Studies Review*, 14 (2) 207-223
- Gutierrez, K., and Rogoff, B. (2003) Cultural ways of learning: Individual traits or repertoires of practice. *Educational Researcher*, 32:19–25.
- Hammersley, M. and Treseder, P. (2007) Identity as an analytic problem: who's who in 'pro-ana' websites? *Qualitative Research*, 7(3) 283–300
- Handley, K., Sturdy, A., Fincham R. and Clark, T. (2006) Within and Beyond Communities of Practice: Making Sense of Learning through Participation, Identity and Practice. *Journal of Management Studies* 43: 641-653
- Hinsliff-Smith, K. (2010) It is Nice to Know that We Might be Doing Something Right. Research Findings from a Case Study of Access Learners on a UK Diploma in Nursing Programme. *Paul Hamlyn Foundation conference on retention and attrition*, Leeds: UK
- James, D., and Biesta G., eds. (2007) *Improving Learning Cultures in Further Education*. Routledge: London.
- James, N. and Busher, H. (2013) Researching hybrid learning communities in the digital age through educational ethnography. *Ethnography and Education*, 8 (2) 194-209
- Jensen, S.Q. (2011) Othering, identity formation and agency. *Qualitative Studies*, 2 (2) 63-78.
- Jephcote, M., Salisbury, J. and Rees, G. (2008) Being a Teacher in Further Education in Changing Times. *Research in Post Compulsory Education* 13 (2) 163-172.
- Jones, K. (2006) Valuing Diversity and Widening Participation: The Experiences of Access to Social Work students in Further and Higher Education. *Social Work Education* 25 (5) 485-500.
- *Jurasaitė-Harbison 2009),
- Kearney, C. (2003) *The Monkey's mask: Identity, memory, narrative and voice*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.
- Lave, J., and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leh, A.S.C. (2002) Action Research on Hybrid Courses and their Online Communities. *Educational Media International*, 39 (1) 31-38,
- Miles, M. B. and Huberman, M. (1994) *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, C.A.: Sage Publications.
- Moland, L. (2011) Agency and practical identity: A Hegelian response to Korsgaard. *Metaphilosophy*, 42 (4) 368 – 375

- Moran, D. (2013) Between outside and inside? Prison visiting rooms as liminal carceral spaces *Geo Journal* 78: 339–351
- Nayak, A. and Kehily, M. J. (2006) Gender Undone: Subversion, Regulation and Embodiment in the Work of Judith Butler. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 27 (4) Troubling Identities: Reflections on Judith Butler's Philosophy for the Sociology of Education, 459-472
- O'Donnell, V. L., and Tobbell, J. (2007) The Transition of Adult Students to Higher Education: Legitimate Peripheral Participation in a Community of Practice? *Adult Education Quarterly* 57 (4) 312-328
- Parry, G. (1996) Access Education in England and Wales 1973–1994: From Second Chance to Third Wave. *Journal of Access Studies* 11: 10–33.
- Piela, A., Busher, H., James, N. and Palmer, A-M., (2013) Agency and future life trajectories in accounts of Access to Higher Education students in England. In K pplinger, B., Lichte, N., Haberzeth, E. and Kulmus, C. (Eds.) (2014) *Changing Configurations of Adult Education in Transitional Times – Conference Proceedings of the 7th European Research Conference, 4 - 7 September 2013, Humboldt-Universit t, Berlin*
- Paechter, C. (2007) *Being boys, being girls: Learning masculinities and femininities*, Abingdon: McGraw Hill
- *QAA 2010
Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (2012) A Brief History.
<http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/aboutUs/background.asp> [Accessed 4 April 2014]
- Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (2013) Key Statistics
<http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/AboutUs/Publications/Documents/Key-statistics-2013.pdf> [Accessed June 2014]
- Reed-Danahay, D. (2005) *Locating Bourdieu*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Richardson Bruna, K. (2008) Jesus and Maria in the jungle: An essay on possibility and constraint in the third-shift third space. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, 4: 221–237.
- Rostami-Povey, E. (2007) Gender, agency and identity, the case of Afghan women in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 43 (2) 294-311
- Scanlon, L. (2009) Identifying Supporters and Distracters in the Segmented World of the Adult Learner. *Studies in Continuing Education* 31 (3) 29-43.
- *Schademan, A. (2010). What does playing cards have to do with science? A resource-rich view of African American young men. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*.
- Seiler, G., and Gonsalves, A. (2010). Student-powered science: Science education for and by African American students. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 43: 88–104.
- Shea, P. and Bidjerano, T. (2013) Understanding distinctions in learning in hybrid, and online environments: an empirical investigation of the community of inquiry framework. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 21 (4) 355-370,
- Stoller, S. (2010) Expressivity and performativity: Merleau-Ponty and Butler *Continental Philosophical Review* 43: 97–110
- Warmington. P. (2002) Studenthood as Surrogate Occupation: Access to HE Students' Discursive Production of Commitment, Maturity and Peer Support. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* 54 (4) 583-600.
- Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

*Zhao, 2006