

Book review

Transformative teaching and learning in further education: Pedagogies of hope and social justice

Rob Smith and Vicky Duckworth

Reviewed by Margaret Malloch, Victoria University

Locality, transformation, and going beyond the system are key messages in Rob Smith and Vicky Duckworth's affirming study of further and adult education. To be able to achieve these in a more extensive further and adult education system, it is necessary to address the exigencies of the current policy agenda of cuts, reviews and narrowing of offerings and overcome them. At one end of the policy spectrum, this education system emphasises productivity with a transmission form of teaching and learning, and at the other, there is, to an extent, a focus on transformative education and the learners themselves.

As explained in Alan Tuckett's foreword, this work was inspired by the Further Education transforming lives and communities in 21st Century Britain Project, in which tutors and students shared, on video, the impact of learning and teaching experience in further learning. The project was conducted in the latter years of the second decade of this century.

It challenges education for the reproduction of social inequality through the provision of stories of hope, resilience, determination, and capability, which together point to the possibilities for an improved model of further and adult education which could contribute also positively to the economy and society.

There is a binary between a bigger picture of economic demands for a skilled workforce, with young adults undertaking training for the workforce, in a bureaucratic system bounded by pressures to report numbers, participation and assessments and the everyday experience of teachers working positively and seeing their students 'learn, grow, thrive and seeing their lives change' (Smith and Duckworth, 2022, p.2). This is in contrast to the British systemic emphasis on funding, accountability, and performance (FAP), a system familiar to Australian readers.

The authors are inspired by Jarvis' identification of a 'moral relationship' in teaching in adult education, to encourage and facilitate achievement of potential. (Jarvis, 2004, p195 in Smith and Duckworth, 2022, p.4). There is a conceptualisation of transformation as a social good, for social and economic benefits and to contribute to social equality and justice. There is also an appropriate acknowledgement that not all further education is transformational.

The book is organised into an introduction to the project, the policy context, and the methodological approaches. The voices of the students and teachers are a key element.

The key themes of transformative teaching and learning and social justice, education leadership provide heart-warming stories of being valued for who they were, experiencing successes, working out study and pathway goals, and gaining opportunities for study, career, and individual and social life goals. These are then considered in relation to the binaries of an academic/vocational divide, with inequality and social division countered by social mobility. Leadership, governance, and the role of the teacher are key in buffering the students against the culture of funding, accountability, and performance-driven imperatives.

Theoretical underpinnings of transformative education with its emphasis on belief, hope, and care are explored. Transformative teaching and learning are defined further, exploring theoretical understandings. The final chapter 'What needs to be done' to enhance

transformative education, argues for increased funding, leadership changes, and the importance of the local. There is a case put forward for creating a space for individual development and for a positive impact on the wider society.

The mixed methods research facilitated gaining the stories of students, their teachers, families, friends, community, and employers. Surveys were also employed to check the themes emerging from the narratives in a broader context. Videos of discussions went onto the project website, a central point for the project, which enabled qualitative data for knowledge production to be presented and shared. There was a tangible demonstration of positive communication and the development of meaning. This approach is a thoughtful example of how digital technology can be used for qualitative research rather than as a means for collecting quantitative data for assessment and comparisons.

The work is underpinned by a consideration of a theoretical lens, particularly that of critical pedagogy drawing in the work of Freire and Giroux.

The researchers' own journeys demonstrated the importance of policies and the opportunities afforded by further education. The research project learners' stories presented and analysed in the book illustrate the value of support from teachers, family, employers, organisations, and communities.

Case studies of individuals provided accounts of the impact on symbolic violence, labelling and streaming, exclusion, and being ignored. Students expressed negative feelings about their schooling experiences, which left them feeling failures and with their self-identities needing to be restored. Obstacles such as health, language, finances, and family responsibilities had to be overcome to achieve educational and career goals. The importance of being valued, recognised, and inspired contributed to the formation of positive identities. The narratives are heart-warming accounts of growth and achievement, by individuals and with extension, to family and community development.

These transformations of both young and mature-aged learners in moving from negativity to learning to becoming confident students, workers and family and community members were supported by the flexibility of further and adult education. Further Education has

had to survive the neoliberal period of privatisation, competition, marketisation, and a time of pressure on institutions to perform with little scrutiny as to quality as ‘skills providers’. It is described as a time of people in further and adult education being seen ‘as cogs in the service of employers and the national economy, a view that sees people as objects to be used’ (Smith and Duckworth, 2022, p.15). There is a need for policy and funding reform, but despite this transformative education is still evident.

Leadership would focus on action rather than role; teachers would focus on the learners as people with experience and futures whilst leading through mentoring. Teachers’ autonomy contributes to creativity and positivity, students’ autonomy to feeling competent.

The authors argue for increased funding for a form of education that is valuable to individual citizens and their wider communities, and which should be linked to wider socio-economic policy, and with a focus on social justice.

The Covid 19 pandemic has heightened awareness of social differences, and stronger further education and training could address these positively. In stepping away from the tensions and restrictions of funding, accountability and performance, transformative teaching and learning could make positive contributions to a new holistic space featuring lifelong learning and a vision of a democratic society. This book reminds us of where we have been, where we are currently struggling to maintain and where we might be.

Smith, R., and Duckworth, V., Transformative Teaching and Learning in Further Education Pedagogies of Hope and Social Justice, Policy Press, 2022