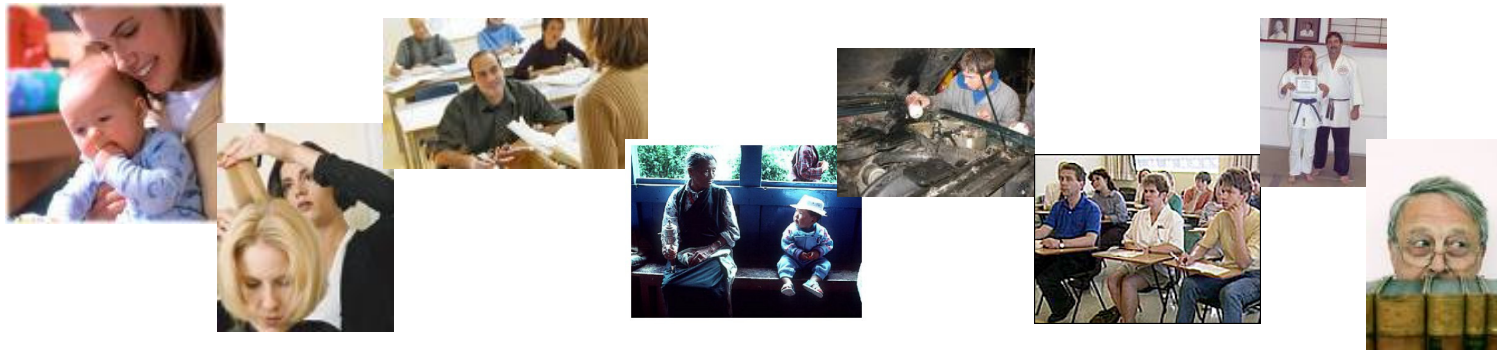


session 16

LEARNING THROUGH THE LIFECOURSE

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Understanding learning through the lifecourse



What have we learned
and why is that important?

- FOUR PROJECTS -

Non-participation in HE: Decision-making as an embedded social practice Alison Fuller, Martin Dyke, Nick Foskett, Ros Foskett, Sue Heath, Brenda Johnston, Felix Maringe, Patricia Rice, John Taylor

Learning Lives: Learning, Identity and Agency in the Life Course Gert Biesta, John Field, Ivor Goodson, Phil Hodgkinson, Flora Macleod

Older people and lifelong learning: choices and experiences Alex Withnall, Victoria Thompson

Identity and learning programme Andrew Pollard, Ann Filer

- RESEARCH POPULATIONS -

- Approx. 430 research participants + 5,000 households (ca. 10,000 individuals)
- Members of family/friendship networks: 13-96 yrs
- Individual adults: 25-84 yrs
- Older adults: 59-85+ some participating in courses others not
- School age children: 4-16 yrs
- Diversity mainly gender and social class

- METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES -

- Biographical and longitudinal life-course, life-history research and ethnography
- Focus groups, questionnaires, learning logs
- Researchers - members of researched group
- Interviews with members of inter-generational family/friendship networks
- Quantitative survey research (BHPS, LFS)

- STRUCTURE OF SESSION -

- Key findings from 3 projects
- Cross-project themes
- Challenges to policy
- Discussion

PROJECT FINDINGS

NON-PARTICIPATION IN HE: AIMS

- To examine the extent to which HE is conceived as 'possible' for 'potentially recruitable' but 'non-participating' adults
- To explore how attitudes to HE and decisions about participation are distributed, embedded & negotiated within inter-generational 'networks of intimacy'

Illustrative Network

Mother-in-law

- Julie Renwick (age 57)
- Lives alone.
- Location: isolated small town
- PT administrator
- Highest qualification: NVQ2
- Experience of HE: No

Mother

- Mary Hanley (age 57)
- Lives with partner.
- Location: isolated small town
- PT caretaker
- Highest qualification: Level 1 shorthand/typing/book keeping
- Experience of HE: No

Aunt

- Anne Miller (age 49)
- Lives with husband and child >11 years.
- Location: isolated small town
- PT Dental Nurse.
- Highest qualification: Level 3 SEN
- Experience of HE: No

Wife

- Cathy Hanley (age 35)
- Lives with husband and children <11years
- Location: isolated small town
- PT Supermarket worker
- Highest qual: NVQ1 Retail
- Experience of HE: No

Entry Point

- John Hanley (age 34)
- Lives with wife and children <11years.
- Location: isolated small town
- Boat builder
- Highest qual: CMI Diploma
- Experience of HE: No

Sister

- Jackie Hanley (age 29)
- Lives alone.
- Location: urban
- PT work and Student
- Highest qualification: Level 4
- Experience of HE: Yes

Friend

- George Harris (age 40)
- Lives with wife and children age <11.
- Location: isolated small town
- Section leader and Boat Builder
- Highest qualification: Level 3
- Experience of HE: No

Friend

- Graham Powell (age 34)
- Lives alone.
- Location: isolated small town
- Not in paid work
- Highest qualification: GCSE
- Experience of HE: No

[1] NON-PARTICIPATION IN HE

[KEY FINDING 1]

- The ‘potentially recruitable’ in our research are living comfortable, stable lives and usually see little need to participate in HE. In engaging with this group, the specific benefits of HE need to be made more apparent.

“I would much rather have a mediocre job and a small wage and be happy and comfortable in my life you don’t have to go to university to do well in life, there are other routes to success”.
(Helen aged 21)

[KEY FINDINGS 2]

- HE experiences within social networks critically shape the perceptions of ‘potentially recruitable’ adults across and within generations.
- Identification with ‘people like me’ in terms of education, social and employment background influences decision-making across and within generations.

LEARNING LIVES

- aim: to understand what learning means and does in the lives of adults
- a biographical approach: learning biographies and trajectories
- outcome: detailed longitudinal evidence of the ubiquity of learning in the life-course

[KEY FINDING 1]

LEARNING THROUGH THE LIFECOURSE

- much learning tacit and routinised
- learning – change/transitions – learning
- differing dispositions towards learning: from ‘a factor in life’ to ‘core identity’
- formal education always linked to informal learning

[KEY FINDING 2]

LEARNING FROM LIFE THROUGH NARRATIVE AND NARRATION

- ‘storying’ is important vehicle for learning from life & sense of self
- quality of narrative correlates with learning potential
- important differences in ‘action potential’, i.e., how learning translates into action and agency

[KEY FINDING 3]

TRAJECTORIES OF PARTICIPATION IN PART-TIME EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- most participation did not result in higher level of qualification
- gender effects are more important than age effects, particularly among young people
- almost everybody stops at the age of 55
- strong link between participation and employment

OLDER PEOPLE AND LIFELONG LEARNING: AIMS

- To explore the influences on older people's experiences of learning across the life course
- To understand what role learning plays in their lives in retirement

RATIONALE

Involvement in learning in later life has been shown to have societal and personal benefits in terms of health and social interaction

BUT

Older people are largely excluded from current educational policy debates

[KEY FINDING 1]

- A range of individual, collective and contextual influences interact to affect people's propensity to learn across the life course including in retirement

[KEY FINDING 2]

- Older people define 'learning' in a variety of ways but perceive it to have a range of positive outcomes in their lives



[KEY FINDING 3]

- Many older people maintain a variety of interests well into old age and enjoy learning in a range of different ways in order to ‘keep an active brain’ and for sheer pleasure and enjoyment

CROSS PROJECT THEMES

1. Decisions about participation through the life-course have personal and collective dimensions: social, cultural, historical contexts and trajectories.
2. Social capital sheds light on role of interpersonal ties in decision-making.

3. Adults can and do overcome negative experiences with schooling.
4. Generational and cohort effects (gender and class) on educational decision-making.
5. What counts as (good) learning and who decides remains highly contested.

CHALLENGES FOR POLICY

There's a need:

1. for impartial professional information, advice and guidance for adults across the life-course
2. to invest in opportunities for lifelong learning across all three domains: economic, personal and democratic
3. for high-quality work-related and employer supported learning for those in employment

challenges for policy

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There's a need:

4. for those who are not in employment to have access to learning as well
5. to recognise that learning is often not linear or hierarchical and to create structures and systems which support rather than constrain participation

DISCUSSION