

Discourse and Analysis of Student Motivation: the Unique Nature of Mature Students and their needs and expectations in attending Higher Education: case study of mature students' motivation at an independent College

Professor Nick Papé, PhD; Nazim Uddin, FCCA; Rahaman Hasan, PhD

Abstract

Extracted from original research, this article explores the motivation of students to undertake Higher Education as adult learners. Qualitative analysis of eight students' interview texts highlights the necessity for tutors to be aware of students' different needs and stages of development. This article identifies and addresses the unique nature of mature students and suggests some ways forward for educational providers and educators prompted by the complexities involved in teaching mature students.

Findings of motivational factors may be grouped into nine headings: financial benefits; practising learned skills; future benefits; transformation; subject content; gaining certifications; imparting knowledge to others; networking with peers, and satisfying a curiosity. All have the underlying theme of the relationship with the pedagogist.

Conclusions drawn include the essential nature of offering encouragement to students to consider their perceptions of what motivates them to study and the benefit gained from students expressing themselves so that tutors can scaffold new learning.

Key Words: Mature students; Motivation; Push and pull factors; Extrinsic; Intrinsic.

Introduction

In this article, we argue that the external forces pull individuals to embark on formal educational journeys, whereas the internal forces act as push factors. However, not all students are influenced by the same push and pull factors. Even if a group of individuals are influenced by the same push or pull factors, the degree and intensity to which they are pushed or pulled will be variable. The focus of investigating is on widening access to mature students for a number of reasons, not least because the independent tertiary sector recruits a significant majority of its students from a widening access, mature student background. Additionally, the authors cannot simply ignore the mature student group, not least because there are genuine demands for Higher Education among mature students.

Designing educational opportunities for adults is challenging; adults pursue Higher Education for a plethora of reasons which often revolves around day-to-day and career needs. Additionally, the adults' pre-existing mindsets and their life experiences may not have adequate congruity with the academic theories and concepts. This is particularly true for mature students who often have life experiences that are rich but often complex and may have strict pre-existing mindsets. Traditionally, Higher Education has been delivered by established providers to young students who are still in their formative years and providers often are grounded in a long academic tradition supporting individuals pursuing intellectual excellence. Mature adults with long life experience joining the HE educational providers create a dilemma

for these institutions (Chen, 2014), especially in relation to addressing vital foci, including (a) whether these providers design an educational culture and setting where youthful energies and exuberance are nurtured, as opposed to making the culture and setting inclusive for all ages; (b) should these providers recruit those mature students without any entry qualifications thus increasing the academic risk; (c) as more adults are joining Higher Education courses for a plethora of reasons, we need to design learning opportunities so that the formal educational setting addresses the unique needs of these adults and as well can harness the various motives and motivational energy they have; (d) how do we deliver learning opportunities to accommodate the large number of adult students and their varied needs and motivational sources.

As adults use their life experience as a resource and often use this to validate and justify the knowledge they gain, educators must find content and examples to illustrate the theoretical concepts to which adults can relate. The purpose of investigating sources of motivation (Papé *et al*, 2022) for undertaking Higher Education courses is mainly to improve the learning and teaching environment within the educational setting. If Higher Education providers cannot fully align their educational provision to cater for students' needs and harness these varied motivators, we could find that many mature students will be unlikely to attend the course and those who enrol may not continue with the course. The authors note from studies that mature students seek providers offering flexibility in scheduling, personalised instruction and educators who support students' needs (MacDonald, 2018). Therefore, understanding how mature students learn differently from traditional young students can help educators integrate more appropriate teaching strategies into their courses (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

This article identifies and addresses the unique nature of mature students and their needs and suggests some ways forward for educational providers and educators prompted by the complexities involved in teaching mature students. It is intended to enlighten the public, including HE practitioners, about the intrinsic and extrinsic reasons (London, 2009) motivating students to pursue higher education study and the context or situations that have typically influenced or affected their decision to do so. We explore whether decisions were driven by intrinsic desires, such as curiosity or the simple enjoyment of knowing a subject that internally pushed them. or extrinsic benefits such as imparting knowledge or skill to others, support their career need via gaining some practical skills, earning a certificate at the end of the course, securing worthwhile employment, earning improved financial incentives, meeting new friends and lecturers tempted them to choose their mode of study. Li and Bray (2007) posit push-pull factors are external motivating forces which impact on behaviours and choices made by students, the influence depends on the personal characteristics of the actors, which is considered to be the main limitation of the push-pull model, although it has valuable mechanisms. These characteristics may include gender, age, academic ability, socio-economic status, motivation and aspiration. However, while some individuals may decide to respond to push and pull forces, others may not do so.

Once there is familiarity with students' expectations from their course and what motivates them, the next challenge for adult educators is to understand adult students, their characteristics and personalities, so as to enable us to individualise and tailor our teaching method for the good of each adult. One of the most important elements for instructors to remember is the need to treat adult learners as adults and maintain a positive learning environment and communication (Mostafa, 2017). In the rapidly changing world of work, where a career for life is no longer relevant for a vast group of adults, there are many societal benefits

of educating mature students who are in between career changes. In addition to the utilitarian benefits of Higher Education for individuals and the economic benefits of adults updating or renewing competence, knowledge and qualifications, adult Higher Education has been attributed to promoting a number of societal benefits, including cultivating a sense of belonging through positive social and academic interactions. In addition to the utilitarian benefits of Higher Education for individuals and the economic benefits of adults updating or renewing competence, knowledge and qualifications, Goncalves & Trunk (2014) propose adult Higher Education has been attributed to promoting a number of societal benefits, including cultivating a sense of belonging through positive social and academic interactions. Engesbak *et al.* (2010) argue that the aim has changed from enlightenment to simply education and then increasingly more work-related and/or as a part of identity-shaping and self-realisation with education and training now intended to prepare the population for societal and working-life changes.

Teaching Methods

Caruth (2014) found that mature students' past experiences and knowledge of the community, employment, and balancing family life with work can offer the mature students as a valuable resource. These experiences can allow them to deeply engage with the content of a course. Once educators are familiar with students' expectations from their course and what motivates them, the next challenge for adult educators is to understand adult students, their characteristics and personalities so as to enable a teaching method for the benefit of each adult. Understanding adults will help create a positive learning environment, and one of the most important elements for instructors to remember is the need to treat adult learners as adults and maintain a positive learning environment and communication (Mostafa, 2017).

Considering the heterogeneous nature of adults' background, motivation, learning styles, interests, needs and goals, adult education should be contextualised and grounded in students' own experience and wherever possible include dialogue and experiential techniques (Chakanika, *et al.* 2016). The Socratic method of teaching is based on the teacher and student dialogue, where teachers ask leading questions and guide the learner to discovery. The dialogue uses critical inquiry to challenge preconceived thoughts and established doctrines (Bates, 2019). Both allow the learner's understanding to emerge rather than presenting it already packaged and completed (Buckingham, *et al.* 2011). When a student responds to the constructive cross-examination begins, the teacher responds with another question that prompts the student to think more deeply and offer a new answer. Noddings (2018) recognise the process continues until either teacher or student or both decide the analysis has gone as far as they can take it at the moment.

In terms of methods, dialogue is pivotal to the success of adult learning programmes. For Freire (1972), dialogue takes the centre stage of all adult learning processes and argues that it is through dialogue that people's world views are transformed. Chakanika, *et al.*, 2016 posits that dialogue during the active learning phase allows educators to incorporate several views of a discussion topic by making use of the differing views and backgrounds within the classroom. Dewey on the other hand advocated an organic, even holistic approach (Johnston, 2010), where education provides students with opportunities to explore the everyday world, introducing new topics through connection to the old and stressing interpersonal and relational dimensions of development through shared activities. Educators can actively involve mature students in learning through group discussions, simulation exercises, problem-solving activities, case methods and experimental methods rather than using transmittal techniques.

In terms of methods, the authors propose the adult learning environment should accommodate a variety of interactive methods, including brainstorming, group discussions, role playing and simulation exercises, problem-solving activities, case studies and experimental methods in preference to transmittal techniques. There is an increasingly competitive market where student choice is at the heart of education regulations; mature students tend to make higher education decisions based on the flexibility of scheduling, payment options and relevance to training needs (Stevens, 2014). Educators should make educational provision as adaptive as possible to meet the needs of mature students (MacDonald, 2018). If Higher Education providers cannot fully align educational provision to cater these needs and harness varied motivators, many mature students will be unlikely to attend the course, and those who enrol may choose not continue. Mature students perform relatively poorly in retention, participation and attainment. The answer partly lies in a possible expectation gap between what mature students expect and what is delivered. Studies (MacDonald, 2018) posit that mature students look for providers offering flexibility in scheduling, personalised instruction and educators who support students' needs. Therefore, understanding how mature students learn differently from traditional young students can help educators integrate more appropriate teaching strategies into their courses (Merriam and Bierema, 2014).

Students Preferences Evidence

The starting position for many researchers comes from a sense that tutor-student relationships might well be significant and wide-ranging in relation to student learning. This is borne out from experiences by both tutors and lecturers. Case-study research (Yin, 2003) does not 'prove' the significance of this relationship but instead provides rich data that has the potential to illuminate the issues. In education the researchers believe in the need to adjust the teaching programme to the needs and interests of the individual. Bell (1996) proposes that it is necessary to direct the attention of the tutor toward the student as a person and away from specific subjects. Thus, the individual's motivations become important.

There is strong integration between theoretical and conceptual propositions expounded by authors and students' direct responses to questions about learning preferences. Using contextual research (Papé *et al*, 2022) increases the credibility of findings and evidences the results are congruent with each other (Onwuegbuzie, *et al*, 2010).

Rationale for Contextual Research

Petry (2018) claims that omission of rationale can be criticised as the most frequent incidence in research papers shows a lack of contributions to theory and/or practice. The rationale is necessary to justify the need for the research and the approach taken. In establishing rationale for the research, we argue that contributions flow naturally during interviews as the rationale for the study is provided and justified within existing literature.

By starting with an observed problem, a researcher can then pose scientifically interesting questions that build upon prior research to address the problem. Levitt (2005:114), proposes:

You are almost never the first person to try and answer an interesting research question...if you are, the question may not truly be very interesting

The debate about what makes an article interesting is for elsewhere, but if guided or evaluated by a wide readership assumes priority over the search for evidence-based knowledge, then research will continue to be of interest to the few who have the desire to challenge and explore margins of knowledge. The reasoning requires authors to show that they have critically

engaged in, and have mastery of, existing research that they wish to extend. This will provide confidence that the research question is not trivial and would contribute to our community. Moreover, the authors have mastery of relevant theory pertinent to the problem context, including those originating in other fields. However, while references to the theory developed in prior work help to set the stage for new arguments, listing references to these theories alone is not sufficient. Instead, authors need to critically engage with this prior work to show their logic and explain their rationale (Sutton and Staw, 1995). Hence our detailed selected literature review throughout this article, gives evidence to such positioning. Rationale, including critical engagement with existing work, clear constructs and relationships and compelling evidence with logical reasoning, can provide new insight, challenge existing perceptions and provide utility to inform future research and practice.

Whilst the reader might reasonably expect rationale to be focused when the main research question incorporates seeking reasons, the researchers note the breadth of the rationale evidencing for those undertaking Higher Education, a number of themes and subthemes, among which were explicit pressures from within families (Papé, 2017) '*... [I need] to get out of the house...*' and '*...I've spent 21 years just being at home, I wasn't working...*' (St 1); '*... my mind was just going to sleep and studying anything was waking me up...*' (St 2). Some of these texts might also be grouped as evidence of the tension between personal development and familial duty (Hochfeld, 2008) '*...I think over the years you forget what actually [happened] when you start looking after your family...*' (St 2) and '*...stuck in the house and you forget how much brain power [I have]...*' (St 2). Responses underlined how personal development added value to the household understanding the choice dilemma or prioritisation of professional or family obligations (Fairchild, 2003), balancing the need for adequate resources (Quimby and O'Brien, 2004). '*...If I study more, my family will...benefit...*' (St 3), which perhaps provided a strong impetus for individual's progress. Research (Caston, 2019) contributes to the goal to have a deeper understanding of the family and extended family living with the respondent and how knowledge of the family might enable twenty-first-century tutors' education and training needs to include the well-being and goals of every student.

Thus, within rationale we might consider the motivation of personal development, interestingly cited by adult students. What emerged from transcripts was the wish for personal development to occur in the extrinsic or conscious paradigms. '*...when my daughter is older, I will go back to University and I will get my degree; that's the main motivator that was for me...*' (St 2). The respondent recognises education can provide the prospect for her development in an environment that values human diversity and quality of opportunity, perhaps not knowing that some sociodemographic student groups (i.e., female students, older migrant students) face, in fact, a higher risk of attrition from online or blended education programmes than others (Stoessel *et al*, 2015). The knowledge that '*...[It will] benefit my career...*' (St 5) and '*...the professionalism and of course, widen my scope of life...*' (St 5) is identified consciously as an opportunity to '*... undertake education so that I can get more knowledge and skills and they become a professional with good credibility...*' and thus an aim becomes the motivation. The statement that '*...I have always wanted to...go to higher education and get more knowledge...*' (St 2) is perhaps reminiscent of the unconsciousness incompetence of an apprentice level student in which education is understood at the prescriptive level of being taught by rote. Here we might expect an introduction of theoretical concepts and basic skills. She has still to develop from unconscious incompetence to conscious incompetence (Anderson *et al*, 2003), a feature of this early period of development. At this beginning stage, her motivation seems important, launching her into a life that hopefully bring further rewards.

Extrinsic Domain: Entrepreneurship as a Motivator

Further evidence for motivation is offered by an expectation of career development involving perhaps start-up or growth of business '*...I start in UK as a normal worker...and then [started] the study of Entrepreneurship...to make my future better for me...*' (St 4). Indeed, the title of the course studied includes the word 'entrepreneurship'. Thus, the learning for the College is to ensure the curriculum is set to encourage a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship, but our study cannot make any suggestions as to which type of entrepreneurship education is most suitable for stimulating entrepreneurial behaviour, as this will be a matter of identification of opening, provider expertise in pedagogy and student demography. The reason for commencing the course, for this student, was defined as a motivator of personal development tempered by ambivalence about career change '*...advancement in career...I should be able to manage the project and make a business plan...*' (St 3), the implication being expressed as a hope to be successful in the studies.

For another student the rationale for undertaking a Higher Education course is because it '*...gives me more chances of getting a different job...or maybe even doing...my own business...*' (St 8). This might be considered as a tension between career decision self-efficacy and career indecision (Grier-Reid & Skaar, 2010). In addition to shedding light on the nuanced relationship between empowerment or career decision self-efficacy and indecision, the text indicates that potential constructivist career development can empower culturally diverse college students.

The role of the tutor has particular significance for students' learning and therefore it is essential for tutor training to include a detailed knowledge of entrepreneurial behaviour, which could be modelled for students at this formative stage of their chosen careers. The relationship with the tutor, plays its part in encouraging student learning, perhaps in the expectation that such modelling would reinforce the student's wish for '*...the business course [to] help me to know business, [to] plan my business...*' (St 2)' in the expectation that '*...entrepreneurship is the best way to fulfil [my] goal in the future...*' (St 2). Research evidence (Hessels *et al*, 2008) explores how socio-economic variables can explain the prevalence of aspiring entrepreneurship and whether socioeconomic variables can explain an individual's entrepreneurial motivations. Although many papers have been written on aspects of entrepreneurial enthusiasm in relation to starting or taking over a business, little is known about the contributing factors of various entrepreneurial motives. These can include motives of innovation as necessity and of autonomy or independence, one of the most cited 'pull' factors for starting a business (Carter *et al*. 2003) with financial gain as a highly referenced 'push' factor. Of course, individuals may also be pushed into entrepreneurship under a number of different scenarios.

The general pattern of age differences in motivational factors, indicate factors motivating self-employment are systematically intertwined with and embedded in, both age and culture. The fear of losing ability due to the ageing process is counterintuitive to those who consider expertise increases with experience. However, for this student, the ageing process seemed to be a challenge '*... as I grow older, I was not able to do...work efficiently...*' (St 7). Minola *et al* (2016:189) propose that the motivation for self-employment happens over a lifetime, being:

... intertwined with, and in part an expression of, the person's general psychosocial development. This general development is a lifelong process from birth to late adulthood and follows certain normative timetables and developmental trends within biological and social potentials and constraints across the lifespan.

So perhaps we can consider this is a feature of psychosocial rather than chronological development.

Intrinsic or Affective Domain

The drive to attain criteria benchmarked against regulatory standards can mitigate against the individual student's personal aspirations or goals (Hassel & Giordano, 2015), which can be partly assuaged by appointments of staff as 'student affairs specialists' under the more general guise of customer service (Bauman, 2018). Personal development as evidenced in student responses of stated goals '*...I wish to become a better person...*' and '*...it [studying] will personally make me happy...*' (St 1) can be understood as being prime goals of education and ideally addressed by student engagement officers. Baumann (2018) further proposes that education must be able to be responsive to students' goals, whilst understanding the balance between providing education as a dilution of the experience, in the belief that the paying customer is right, and true learning, however uncomfortable for the student.

A product of education is individual change, again evidenced in students' comments '*...I'm a very outspoken person, it helped me realize [I am] that at home...*' (St 5), so listening assumes a higher priority for this student, which is also reflected in the comment '*...I'll have to really think and think so that I don't forget the question...*' (St 5). To make a change to 'escape' comfort zone seemed an aim of these students, very much arbiters in personal development. Both students concentrated on their own personal development when reflecting on the theme 'changes', without eschewing the parts played by the tutors and peers. Perhaps this indicated a stronger reliance on self and understanding of their movement towards autonomy in learning, accepting that their only responsibility is change to self.

Intrinsic change assumes the initial general education delivers the basic knowledge necessary before proceeding to more specialised study (Most & Wellmon, 2015). The absence of formal secondary education does not of course either preclude or enforce change of personal development, nor does it lessen educational objectives of engaging students as partners in learning and teaching. It does have the propensity however, to encourage students to take on new learning quickly, evidenced by '*...Life is changing, so the old way will not do, [as] it is different from now...*' (St 3) and thus, facilitates change.

Extrinsic Domain

Financial Benefits

To understand the meaning of future financial benefits, the authors keep in mind the relationship with and impact on some non-monetary benefits of education, which could include benefits of lifestyle, health, fertility, familial and savings (Vila, 2000). Qualitatively (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) defining a 'better career' is very dependent on the source, which anecdotally is described through this research. Students, attending are at or near entry level to Higher Education and in general have still to achieve sophisticated careers. Earning levels are mainly in the potential stage and much excitement is expressed in interviews about the challenges and rewards resultant in exploring the benefits that additional financial resources can offer. All participants are studying business management and entrepreneurship courses; so we might expect career improvements to be included as well as heightened abilities to develop the operation of individually owned companies.

When considering financial benefits, the spectre of educational debt and repayment may be interpreted from some responses. Nonis, *et al.* (2022) suggest that the ease and swiftness

with which students can accrue large sums of debt may influence students' opinion about educational finance debt, especially in terms of costs and benefits. Indeed, although financial benefit is a main theme in our findings, there is evidence of interviewees' refusal to discuss this theme in detail, which might be understood as students being aware of increasing the risk of default and thus reduction in general fiscal well-being. This also has the potential to result in negative outcomes including dropping out of college, high levels of stress and low self-esteem and insofar these are conscious, or the fear is conscious, avoidance to address financial issues in detail is understandable.

On the supply side of financial benefits, it can be argued that loans and debt are most likely to deter poorer groups from participating in higher education, as low-income families do not always accept middle-class values of debt as a way of life. At present, paradoxically, the policy of paying for wider access to Higher Education increases the financial consequences of participation because of a careful assessment that it is financially sensible. Thus, a student expresses both hope and fear of financial benefits '*...there is a less possibility of losing money on it, because as I know [it] as a prediction by my book-wise and academic background...*' [St 4]. Financial motivation is strengthened in the knowledge that learning will follow from educational courses attended, highlighting the need and ability to practice financial prudence. Christie & Munro (2003) collate research that suggests that immediate financial rewards are not substantial and the repayment of the loans is a real burden, which perhaps is not surprising as financially inexperienced students may not know what it will be like to repay the debt incurred. However, there is little or no evidence to suggest that better knowledge would have dissuaded some of our interviewees from making the choices they made.

In terms of outcomes, interviewees' responses evidence instances of future financial benefits being placed at risk as individual's own private means were used to pay educational fees '*...I didn't get finance for the whole time that I was at LCC...*' (St 2). Indeed, this student underscores the risk by placing herself at a seeming disadvantage '*...(I) sacrificed many things including finance to achieve what (I) wanted to achieve...*' (St 2). Thus, the drive to undertake education seemed more important than the goal of future financial benefits, although she was able to access funding for the following year '*...at University without the student finance, I would never have been able to do this in the last year...*' (St 2). The commitment to study was so strong that even the soaring costs of the course fees did not deter this student.

Determination to make use of the learning opportunity is encapsulated in the statement '*...look I can manage as long as you're satisfying what you want to do...*' (St 2), with only an implication that as finances are highly prioritised, attendant financial benefit is implicit rather than explicit. Perhaps more evident of seeking financial benefit are the statements '*...I like making money...*' (St 6) and '*...I have (to) find more at the end of my days...*' (St 6). There is recognition that students can and should play a part in managing their own occupations. This may mean they have to be more proactive in their own career choice and progress, for example, getting to know prominent people, pursuing assistance and bringing attention to their accomplishments. Sturges, *et al* (2002) research finds that links do exist between career management and successful financial benefits, with the former begetting the latter. Being positive that financial benefits will accrue from education leading to a worthwhile career is the statement '*...(I) wanted to build a good career and secure my financial future...*' (St 1). Financial benefits will not only assist the development of the individual but also the individual has the opportunity through education to stimulate the much sought-after benefit of increased incomes. This is succinctly summed up in the student's phrase '*...I have to be a good businesswoman*' (St 1).

There is little or no evidence of students opting to choose the course for immediate financial benefits. Students did not explicitly mention or made an inference that they undertook the study to gain financially whilst they are studying. It is not surprising given that they are aware that these were loans that they have to pay back and whilst they were studying they sacrifice their times and efforts to pursue, which had a high opportunity cost.

Enjoying practising the skills needed in my life and career

The authors examined the transcripts meticulously to identify the main thrusts as well any emerging themes within the transcripts and then judiciously decide the extent to which these themes relate to the questions used in the quantitative survey instrument. In this section we explore the extent to which the transcripts provide evidence in support of question three in the Quantitative survey instrument, which is “enjoying practising the skills needed in my life and career”. Simply using the key word ‘skills’ or its synonyms may not provide a fuller picture, so we decided to identify any signals/hooks/proxy words which can help us to determine the importance of seeking or practice skills motive to the prospective students.

Fotopoulos (2012) posits that education has an increased acceptance in the developed world, as the responsibility of the state, and it is perhaps this acceptance that has been integrated by learners as a paradigm of liberal modernity. This paradigm is characterised by the belief in an autonomous unbiased truth, culminating in minimisation of social controls over markets for the protection of learners. This ‘neo-responsibility’ has the potential for the learner to avoid accountability for action, evidenced by an unconscious defensive minimisation, inasmuch one respondent proposed practising learned skills to be an ‘...*ancillary reason; almost like a by-product...*’ (St 2); thus, the fear of change was exhibited by minimising importance. This is even more noticeable in the statement that although seeking transformation (McCune *et al*, 2010), the denial of learning outcomes does not include consciously attaining expertise or proficiency ‘...*I did not intend to acquire any particular skills...*’ (St 3). Those who adopt a superficial approach perhaps have less interest and adopt tactics which minimise both time on the task in hand as well as the task itself. In one case the task and desired outcome is to ‘...*start [a] business...*’ (St 1), with personal development mentioned ‘...[to become] ‘...*a better practitioner...*’ (St 1). Skills are not mentioned.

Conversely two skills identified as being sought were presentation and negotiating, often considered ‘soft’ skills (Sparrow, 2018) concerning competencies and behaviour. Soft skills might be considered to cover

...multifarious abilities such as communication and interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, team skills, negotiations skills, social grace, time management skills, business etiquettes. Soft skills are becoming essential for professional success... (Sparrow, 2018:556).

Given the importance of these skills, we could support student learning in pedagogy and assessment in at least some of these skills in adult classes, whatever the challenges, in the interest of better preparing our students for their futures. The strong incentive for understanding these implicit and explicit skills motivates those engaged in critical discussion, which involves them to resolve disputes by stimulating self and others to express opinions on the issue, examine each other's work, think about others' points of view, make comments and negotiate meaning (Yan & Kember, 2004). Such active interchange is advantageous to acquiring alternative perspectives and the construction of personal meaning, which is significant to the growth of the critical mind very much found in ardent learners, exemplified by the student's statement ‘...*to work smart instead of pure hard work...*’ (St 5). Thus, the recognition of skills possession becomes a targeted outcome. However, for another student

‘...gaining the skills was not the main driver...’ (St 6) but rather transformation included skills without being identified or explicit. At a visceral level this can be understood but again, denial is presented as a mechanism to protect the individual from negative external influences. However, from the same student there is acceptance of the *‘...desire to make a difference in [my] own life...’* (St 6) as being the reason for choosing this course. Although, in some respondents no skills are explicitly mentioned, it is implicitly shown in two students’ statements in which they expected the course to help provide resource for an improved future *‘...I want to establish a better career... and to be able to deal with people...’* (St 5) and *‘... developing [my] career was the principal reason...by improving professional skills’* (St 4). This was further offered by the student *‘... I understood that writing, presentation and negotiation skills were not good enough...I pursued this course to develop [my] career and acquire these skills...’* (St 7).

The authors are aware that ‘skills’ possession is a means which can help individuals to achieve other motives including sharing knowledge/skills, the dream of transformation, immediate and future financial benefits. Therefore, if a student claims to study the course for a better career, we can assume that an implicit means to gain a better career is gaining or practising skills. Additionally, if a student wishes to pursue a higher education to have a certificate/credential, they might assume that credential/certificate is evidence of knowledge and skills as certificates can only be gained if a student fulfils the learning outcomes of the course aims.

We believe that skills acquisition is a reason for study for most students interviewed; however, it is unclear whether the reason itself was deemed as important. In the transcripts we looked at attributes and adjectives used to which could be understood as proxy indicators for importance, however, the attributes and adjectives did not give us substantial information for us to safely label the responses in the transcripts as having overriding status.

Future Benefits

Osborne, Marks, and Turner (2004) reported that the UK Higher Education (UKHE) sector has experienced a decline of mature students re-entering full-time education within UKHE in the recent past, whereas increase of part-time students has been evidenced specially among women (Davies, 1999), and that influenced them to undertake a study investigating the rationale behind such decline; very similar to this study where we investigated the rationale of a mature student undertaking higher education in an Alternative Provider with the UKHE. Osborne, *et al*’s (2004) study outlined number of factors influencing the decision making of a mature student in undertaking higher education, which could be categories in four main areas broadly:

1. national policies related to recruitment, e.g. Student finance, widening access
2. economic and labour market conditions
3. the policy and practice of individual institutions within HE and FE
4. personal background and circumstances of potential student

Acknowledging Davies and Williams’s (2001) claim that identifying the key factor influencing the decision of a mature student to re-enter HE is complex, the factors could be further classified in two categories:

1. Positive factors, such as, anticipation of benefits, cognitive interests, self-confidence, self-respect and self-belief and support from family

2. Negative factors, such as, anticipation of limited benefits, attitude to debt, lack of confidence and self-belief, family and employment constraints and unresponsive institute

Reviewing the factors and categories, it becomes evident that many of the reasons influencing a mature student in undertaking higher education are associated with uncertainty in the future. As a result, the authors investigate how this uncertainty of 'what will happen in some future situation' influences our research participants. A theme that emerges is the impact Higher Education might have on future situations of participants although there is little evidence that students identified a future situation as being a driver for study. Reflecting on thinking about future situations as praxis, encourages participants from early on in the course to become conscious of shared objectives to obtain competency in chosen profession and passing the certification examinations. There was a sense that the individual could increase agency and control over learning by contributing to the collective agency and control (Emad & Roth, 2016); there was therefore a sense that contributing to increasing the learning opportunities of others enhanced individual learning opportunities, thus further improving possibilities for the future. This is expressed generally as *'...to build up my career, develop my career ... to getting a good career...'* (St 4). In a formal adult educational setting, if a common goal emerges for learners to work collectively to accomplish success by fully participating in the course tasks, classrooms can support and stimulate plans and goals in which future situations become verbalised, understood by one participant aspiring to work in marketing as *'...by engaging with curriculum... it sparked me, you know it...'* and *'...I realise that this is what I like doing. I didn't know that before. So, coming into College and starting this course has made me realise that I like these sorts of things, marketing is basically meeting other people...'* (St 2).

In the educational environment, the intermediate stage of making decisions which might impact future situations, could be considered as the commitment to study, whether for its own sake or for a particular purpose. Indicative of this are the statements from one participant *'...I have to go through; I have to study more to do something in my future. That's why I have the idea...'* and *'...to go and study more and if you study and succeed, then [at] any age studying you can do anything [in work] ...'* (St 3). Solid reasons were expressed through the impact of study *'...if I study more, my family will benefit, my friend[s]...it will be beneficial'* (St 6) and *'...I have to just study first and then the things I mentioned [advantages], that will come later...'* (St 7). The observation that study is beneficial reflects the increasing societal requirement that colleges must become more responsive to national economic needs (Alexander, 2000) and regulatory demands for increased performance.

The many reasons discussed in this paper for undertaking learning for an improved future, include social conscience *'...in [the] health sector I want to care more efficiently...'* (St 5) and altruism *'...to invest in the poor people who can learn to study, I can help the poor people ... I wanted to leave a legacy...'* (St 8). Ethical values, both innate and learned, provide the opportunity when individuals experience a high degree of career satisfaction, no better exemplified than the wish of one participant to *'...to open the Caring agency is in my future plan...'* (St 1). Research (Valentine *et al*, 2011) demonstrates that ethical values, career satisfaction and altruism are inter-related, suggesting that it is essential for educational organisations to advance an ethical environment to ultimately enhance work-value congruence.

Higher Education for adults provides opportunities for students to learn at a graduate level from both pedagogy and experience (Jarvis, 2014) *'...I was [one of] those with hardly any*

communication with anybody ... going to College, I found that I was able to bring out that side of me... (St 2) and perhaps more precisely *'...I wanted ... to learn from College and activate my business...'* (St 8). In the future, this might provide a situation in which status is gained *'...to professionally react, like educated persons who understand the area they are talking about...'* (St 7). These students' texts are preparing the ground for the future, without actually identifying the sought changed scenario as they make preparation for academic work and for careers outside of academe by;

the development of scholarly competencies, involving conceptual understandings of a field, knowledge, and skills relevant to their area of study, interpersonal skills, and professional attitudes and beliefs; ... more frequent, and more expansive; a sense of community, in which students feel they can turn to advisors and not only friends for support and belonging; quality of life, wherein students are able to ascertain ways in which academics navigate and integrate professional and extra-professional life domains (Hermanowicz, 2016:293)

However precise outcomes are identified *'...[to] set up my own business, be a master in my own life ...'* (St 2) and *'...to manage the project and manage a small business project, make a business plan...'* (St 8). Evidence emerges of entrepreneurship *'...it gives me more chances of getting a different job or maybe even doing my own business...'* (St 5) and *'...I want to be an entrepreneur, to learn and activate my business knowledge. I set up a business, become an entrepreneur and want to employ people...'* (St 8). Included in the College's core curriculum is to equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills for opening a business or acting entrepreneurially in other ways. By offering entrepreneurship courses, training, and extra-curricular support, the College aims at creating a supportive context for entrepreneurship, thereby enhancing students' motivation and capability for starting a business (Walter *et al*, 2013), so necessary for the interviewee who also sought advice *'...I have to open my own business and I have no idea who need to talk where I should go for learn all of this...'* (St 1). The authors believe that the prevalence of and networking with fellow students who have attended entrepreneurship education, increases students' own tendency to carry out a first entrepreneurial activity, even when controlling for individual-level experience and learning has been largely contained from own course participation. While this peer effect is likely to hold for nascent entrepreneurship (Bergmann *et al* 2016), there is perhaps less reason to assume that it also affects further progress in the project creation process, i.e., new entrepreneurship. Students have typically only little industry experience and are, therefore, unlikely to be able to provide contacts which might contribute to the establishment of a new business, hence the importance of networking and group studying.

The dream of transformation

Transformation is described in much of community literature as the facilitators' cultural work building a sense of agency and societal direction anchored in relationships with peers. Thus, the experience enabled the learning individual to take on other roles and responsibilities in the surroundings and the community. As with the roles in equitable alliances, the parents and community members who made these relationships, began to be seen and to see themselves as leaders and change agents. Moreover, an emerging body of community-based education reform literature suggests that not only are learners' critical stakeholders in educational transformation (Hong, 2011), but also that they can provide much needed social and intellectual resources and collective political will and power to college improvement efforts (Ishimaru, 2014).

Much has been written on both transformation in the education milieu as well as the dream of transformation by individual students. Students generally were adamant they wanted a better

life brought about by education by *'...changing the status quo...'* [St 2]; *'...be a master in my own life...'* [St 8]; *'...I can make myself something...'* [St 6]; *'...be able to gain sense of achievement...'* [St 5] and *'...to be able to react professionally...'* [St 7]. All these might be considered from the aspect of projected expectations from emerging learners of success including business and personal development. Research provides evidence of substantial over-optimism in expectations, in that:

...nascent entrepreneurs overestimate the probability of their nascent activity becoming an operating venture... (Cassar, 2010: 838)

However, this evidence does not deter the respondents, believing that the learning will be for both *'...my own personal development and career...'* [St 1] and *'...those sorts of things make you perfect...'* [St 7].

Enjoying the subject content

To what extent pursuit of curiosity about a subject area, deriving pleasure in engaging with subject content, or even for deriving instrumental benefits of knowing a body of knowledge be it for mastery of a subject or developing skills and competencies played a role for students to undertake a higher education course at LCC is the subject of our interviews with students. In this theme, the researchers focused on to what extent intrinsic motivation deriving from enjoyment of the subject content itself played a role. Tate (2020) proposes that for those who are open to learning and enjoy the process will develop as individuals, becoming self-actualised and potentially find their purpose or calling in life. Within this self-actualisation, the attraction of the subject content and favoured way of learning perhaps is projected as an ideal and fairly rapidly modified by experience. There are of course those students who are activists in the sense of protesting (Gagnon, 2018), and many of the respondents show signs of firm beliefs and goals, with definite preferences in where learning enjoyment is located. Symptomatic of this is stated evidence that reading (Clark and Svinicki, 2015) and tutor guidance as a study method helped with subject enjoyment more than perhaps any other *'... I prefer where teachers give examples and can leave the group with case study [to read] ...'* (St 8) and coupled with interacting *'...Yes, this case study and question I like...'* (St 1). Throughout students reflected on the content of their business programme as being enjoyable and one of the reasons that education was attractive to them *'... [I am] really good at studying...so I joined up and I loved studying business...'* (St 2) and *'...spend some...time together in study is a fun time...'* (St 6), perhaps highlighting how learning can best be undertaken when enjoyment is experienced, projecting gratification onto the content itself. Another respondent was precise of what particular learning process is enjoyable *'...I upload the photo...online and think I like, I love it...'* (St 6), going on to identify satisfaction with potential pecuniary benefit *'...I like that, that's making money...'* (St 6).

Respondents do indicate a preference for learning socially with others, as part of a grouping or in the company of peers *'...I say teamwork is what I like as well...'* (St 4) and *'...my personality preference is being in a [learning] group...'* (St 1), which perhaps underscores the dissemination of learning and knowledge is essential for the reflective experience of constructing knowledge and developing skills in the process of interaction and teamwork. Pedagogical innovations help enable the individual's development through access to and equality in learning and teaching, which is aided by significant collaborative efforts (Ossiannilsson *et al*, 2016). The argument that learning is best achieved in an enjoyable environment is already made and the process that leads to subject enjoyment can be understood as the favoured style of learning. Interaction is preferred *'...the students got to*

understand the topics better as they saw different sides to the arguments, the argument brought us together, so the debate is very good... (St 8), allowing the student to be inquisitive and not to be taught didactically *'...this is not this way, you have to go look for that way, that's why I think this [use of] question is much better...'* (St 7) and *'...yes, this case study and question...'* (St 1). Also *'...but yeah. Yeah, because I like to, I like to take some time as well. I'm the only one I have no other success...'* (St 6).

Projection into the future is a favourite occupation of respondents, as it not only enables goal-setting but also protects the student from making decisions about addressing present issues. Such avoidance can stimulate the maxim that thinking about the future can lead to better decisions (Thorstad & Wolff, 2018), so this further supports the process. Wanting an improvement perhaps not only in lifestyle but also gratification in learning, this respondent finds attraction in *'...the study [in] entrepreneurship because [it] is making my future nicer if I am able to do any business, then I think it will be better for me...'* (St 3). Dey & Lehner (2017) caution that the promise of enjoyment might cultivate a passive attitude of empty 'pleasure' which effectively deprives learners of its more deep-seated opportunities, with social engagement becoming the preferred outcome to the detriment of learning, *'...I'm meeting some people and a socialising as well; so great, I found some good friends...'* (St 4). Equally, there is evidence of learning enjoyment being secondary to employment fulfilment *'...I've actually got a job in marketing, market research at the moment...I'm enjoying that more...'* (St 2), further explaining *'...the [learning] business side of it, sort of taking a side-track...'* (St 2). Interestingly, from this intervention, there is no indication the benefits of study will increase enjoyment or satisfaction, although the same student did offer enjoyment of learning to be a motivating factor, as above. The drive to be active is apparent here with enjoyment experienced by action *'...I'm just saying I like to do something...in the future I don't know because outside I can support...'* (St 6), with uncertainty and reservation apparent. Evidence is also provided in participant's text that enjoyment in learning is not immediately apparent *'...I have to study, I have to just study...'* (St 3) and here the authors might conclude that the 'drivenness' to study perhaps conceals a satisfaction and enjoyment which introduced the student to education in the first place.

Credentials and Certificates

A credential or certificate not only signifies achievement of a qualification, but it also demonstrates competence and skills and that an individual is trained and equipped to perform certain duties. Perhaps due to the reliance of organisations on credentials to filter candidates or use it as an indicator for knowledge and skills, many students might be interested to study a course of instruction. Therefore, the value of credentials and its role in students' decision to pursue a course of Higher Education has been explored through interviews. There were specific questions and as well probing questions were asked to students to elicit information to what extent credentials/certificates played a role in their decision to pursue the course.

The benefit of gaining a certificate explains only a small variance in the effectiveness of a learner for future employment, Clark *et al* (2017) positing the best assessments of students are those based on classroom performance rather than holding credentials. Perhaps the most common measure of educational attainment is years of completed schooling. This is the credential many of the respondents rely upon when embarking on Higher Education, also appreciating the need to gain further recognition *'... [I have] a school certificate of course; well the higher education I love to study and it was a big gap...'* (St 3). Participants are thus aware of the value of possessing such credentials, one respondent wishing to seek further integrity

and achievement recognition of a professional status *'...The application of my higher education becomes more credible in my workplace...'* (St 5).

Students returning to education receive lower returns to experience and years of schooling than those entering Higher Education without substantial delay, but generally have higher commitment and attainment in completing educational programs. So, the students who pursue the award of a certificate to validate their learning, can anticipate higher financial gains in the employment market and higher confidence as credential holders. When questioned whether the motivation for studying was to gain skills or to gain recognition, i.e., a certificate, the respondent was emphatic, highlighting perceived complexity *'...a very good question, the answer will be very big but I'm going to do it...'* (St 3) but affirming successful certification gained will bring sought rewards *'...If I study more, my family will benefit, my friends will benefit, my communities, everything...'* (St 3). Extensive research by Ferrer & Ridell (2008) concludes credentials are, in an important sense, valued in the labour market and relative to students without a degree, those who have completed an educational programme receive substantial earnings gains associated with these credentials. These earnings gains are as large as, and generally greater than the gains received by non-certificate holders.

There is appreciation by one respondent that certification has been planned for a considerable time *'...I never had any short-term thinking; I wanted to receive a certificate and knowledge from the course from the beginning...'* (St 8), which certainly highlights the commitment of this participant to the course. The participant makes a further rejoinder that benefits will accrue from successful matriculation *'... I thought about the long-term benefits from the course...'* (St 8). The value of College certificates to adult students is explored in Kim & Tamborini's (2019) research, which evidences those annual earnings and earnings growth of vocational certificates are higher over early to mid-adulthood than comparable early entry graduates and indeed many are associated with higher payoffs than bachelor's degree holders.

Imparting/sharing knowledge or skill to others

Another theme developed in the research under the general overall theme of transformation is imparting knowledge or skills to others. In the College context, whilst the operation is in the general milieu of education, the focus of transfer of knowledge can be considered as having the potential to increase social intelligence. Desjardins, in his 2015 seminal discourse *'Education and Social Transformation'*, suggests education is conveyed for the transformation of culture in ways that are in harmony with concepts of social legitimacy and intelligence. Indeed, the authors strongly support this view of transformation, which underlies the College's drive to bring education to widening demographics. The caveat exists that an exclusive focus on factors within educational systems of teaching and learning exchanges and how these are managed, might be too restrictive. We need to include the responsibility of wider institutional learning and other simultaneous outcomes associated with welfare and students' personal development. It is the learned skill that can evidence this in the application in the learner's world, no better explained perhaps by the respondent *'...to educate myself, gain more knowledge to improve my professional skills with good credibility...'* (St 5)

The application of a learned skill is perhaps one aim of education very much evinced by the respondent statement *'...Learning is being able to take something that somebody said, maybe use it somewhere else...'* (St 2), further exemplified by *'...it's a skill, being able to take that and transfer it into some other way...'* (St 2). The understanding and indeed attraction of attending the chosen course, is planned to *'...broaden (my) knowledge and make you come across things probably not needed in your work...'* (St 5), showing an acknowledgement that

learned skills can impact a broad swathe of life, not only the current employment. Equally interesting is the statement ‘...*The course will help me to use some things I learn in my business, like business strategy which I learned...*’ (St 8) suggesting skills and knowledge usage can also be beneficially applied to the present occupation perhaps without appreciation of the broader benefit. This is partly ameliorated by the response ‘...*I can also use the knowledge in various personal occasions, helping my friends to make plans...*’, with the potential to increase the social network as the progression from unconscious incompetence to conscious competence is predicted.

Teaching the English language at the College, although not a main focus of studied courses, is very much part of the curriculum. All pedagogy is undertaken in English so a proficiency must exist before courses can be attempted but enlargement and refinement of this proficiency is an attractive feature for this respondent ‘...I learned to gain knowledge, not only the communications of speaking English...’ (St 3). Vetter *et al*, (2018) posit the imperative is clear, that teacher educators must engage in critical conversations about identity and teaching practices in Higher Education to include language as a core discipline.

One of the skills identified is for the learner to become integrated ‘...I never had the knowledge of being organised properly, planning properly, for many things...’ (St 8), classified as what to integrate and what systems to employ to accomplish goals. The ultimate measure for this phase of integration does not lie simply in the insight of a student's beliefs but in the extent to which other people adopt, use, or benefit from the suggestions (Zhu *et al*, 2016).

How such learning might be beneficial for others is not per se the subject of this research but the opportunity to impact others’ lives constructively certainly provides a motivating factor for many respondents.

It appears from the above discussion that sharing knowledge although not expressed extensively among all participants as a reason for pursuing the higher education course, however, being able and confident to share knowledge is an outcome of educational aims of the course the students studied. Adults constantly share their opinions and knowledge with their friends, colleagues and family members. Being able to share knowledge confidently and competently in social, work and personal settings are hugely important. Despite that the findings suggest that imparting knowledge was not considered as an important factor for students choosing the course at LCC.

Networking with peers and superiors

Networking with peers is a broad term used as a possible reason for students to choose the course and this instance include both being introduced to new friends, classmates, staff and other students. Therefore, in the transcripts the authors considered various synonyms to determine the extent to which networking was ascribed as a reason (albeit teleological) for their study with the College. The semi-structured interview is designed to elicit information which students associated with networking and what role it plays for students to choose the course.

A further theme identified by respondents is networking with peers and superiors, considered by students to be beneficial whilst attending the College. From peers, friendships are created in multiple shapes and patterns and can be identified in almost every social realm and across time yet is often an overlooked social relation. In many ways, friendship is both an equivocal social relation and social institution. The relational aspect might be represented by the respondent statement ‘...*I need to create an impact on some people which I'm doing now...*’

(St 6) and socially shared experiences can be attractive *'...now I make (a) friend, I have to go out sometime going to cinema with him, sometime going to the park...'* (St 1). Mortensen (2019) reflects on the tension between being highly dependent on others in the everyday, while simultaneously being reluctant to be involved with friends for fears, real or imagined. Such might comprise understanding of friendships that is open to and includes stress, conflict and distrust as individuals recognise their lives can be vulnerable and fundamentally intertwined with and dependent on others and at risk of being hurt, exposed or betrayed. However, despite these caveats, the attraction remains *'...if people meet good people, they changed...'* (St 3) so the benefit of friendship is identified.

From establishing friendships, the student will build a network, which is particularly important for the individual's support as well as contributing towards a social structure to help performance. Research by Balkundi & Harrison (2006) concludes that networking can help team performance and poses the dilemma whether teams become more viable because of a central leader, or maybe their viability encourages the leader adopt a central position. This reciprocity is evidenced in the interviewee statement *'...Basically, socially I'm meeting some people and I learned lots of things and I help them out on lots of things as well...'* (St 4), so learning may be seen to be from both peers and superiors.

Satisfying a curiosity

It is to be noted that curiosity could power individual to actively engage in study. Dehaene (2020) considers active engagement as one of the four important pillars of learning (others are attention, error feedback and consolidation). Attention amplifies the information we focus on and active engagement (also known as curiosity) which encourages our brain to ceaselessly test new hypotheses. Curiosity is important as it also linked to memory, the more curious you are about something, the more likely you are to remember it. Considering that almost all students who we interviewed are first generation immigrants and English was not their mother tongue, the researchers used a wide range of synonyms as proxy indicators for the curiosity, including enjoy study, ambition to do the course, reading for pleasure, seeking information for pleasure, information hungry, etc. Studying curiosity and how satisfaction can be gained may be dependent on interest and engagement as well as being a basic instinct, as being born curious (Arnone *et al*, 2011) and certainly increase motivation. Curiosity itself supports a myriad of definitions and explanations, perhaps represented well by the epistemologist's perception understanding and explaining why:

...we seem to value true belief intrinsically insofar as we are spontaneously curious creatures, for curiosity is an interest in finding (and believing) truths... (Whitcomb, 2010:666).

Curiosity resulting in the identification of unknown fragments of information below the level of conscious awareness (Grossnickle, 2016), successfully combines information search with innateness and is a definition that the authors apply to this research. This innate predisposition manifests in participants' texts in many different ways and outcomes, the statement from one participant *'...I'm so interested in creating job opportunities. I want to support my community...'* (St 2) perhaps begs the question 'How can I?', seeking answers to enable the desired outcome. As does being inquisitive in *'...asking them questions; I need to create an impact...'* (St 8). In both these examples of participants' words there is a clear connection between cause and effect, one relying on the other and bringing satisfaction. What curiosity does is to stimulate the process. Considering curiosity satisfaction from an awareness-based view, explains why some good educational practices tend to yield knowledge and importantly how

this removes risks from reward, establishing benefits and fulfilment for them providing sought answers and outcomes. If curiosity takes the participant on a path that is a *cul-de-sac*, alternatives are considered '*...if something go wrong, I can talk about what is Plan A, what is Plan B...*' (St 8), thus increasing the chance for awareness and ultimately satisfaction.

One of the often-stated outcomes by participants for satisfaction is to support development of a future enhanced lifestyle. From satisfaction gained in a more general sense that '*...my future [is] nicer if I am able to do any business; I think it will be better for me...*' (St 3) to a definite goal, studying '*...is to build up my career...*' (St 4). For teaching institutes, providing direction for undergraduate educational programs that are intended to meet the career needs of the adult learner, is a continuing focus. This is supported by research (particularly Basham and Buchanan, 2009), which concludes that business students may be more interested in maximising their outcomes in organisations that are profit-driven, very much a factor in students choosing business-related courses. This is further highlighted by '*...I love to do business in future, and this is the best course...*' (St 3) offering affirmation of a satisfactory goal. Studying with an outcome of curiosity satisfaction is also referred to in students' texts as creating prospects. '*...I have to study more to do something in my future; that's why I have the idea...*' (St 3) and if '*...I think if I go...and do a degree course it will make me much more satisfied...*' (St 5). Satisfaction in the educational environment contributes to the development of intrinsic and continued motivation to learn. Educationally, satisfaction is often described as the sense of accomplishment learners feel at the conclusion of a learning event when the outcomes of their efforts are consistent with their expectations; this is what seems to be hoped for in participants' texts. Gaining the ability to '*...react to professionally react, like educated person who understand the area they are talking about...*' (St 7), giving the learner the opportunity of experiencing feelings of enjoyment, pleasure, and accomplishment (Small & Venkatesh, 2000); this is satisfaction gained from studying and motivation stimulated by curiosity.

Conclusion

Some particular implications from the research, for Higher Education establishments undertaking or planning pedagogy include, when designing HND courses and course activities, how it is essential to encourage students to offer their perceptions of what motivates them to study. The advantage of being able to incorporate students' views, at this time, is clearly demonstrated in this research. The opportunities for the student to express opinions also presents openings for the tutor, as the more experienced other, to scaffold new learning in the ZPD. The role of the tutor has particular significance for students' learning and therefore it is essential for tutors to include a deep understanding of students' needs at this formative stage of their chosen careers (Grier-Reid & Skaar, 2010).

Students move through stages and can regress. In all preferences established in this research, there is clear evidence that students have different achievements and needs, not just of learning factual content but also understandable from the perspective of educational theories and concepts. It is essential for tutors to recognise and understand the process of defence mechanisms and be able and prepared to work with students during problematic times. These defences might include self-sabotage (Metzl, 2010), repeating behaviours which were learned through reliance on unconscious defences and power-sharing, giving and receiving, which is symptomatic of progression-regression repetition (Shabad, 1993).

Care is taken not to suggest generalised implications from a limited number (eight) of student participants' responses and reflections. However, there are messages contained in the

research that are repeated time and again, by student interviewees, in an effort to convey what they considered is important for their learning. A further implication from the research is the benefit gained from students expressing themselves so that tutors can scaffold new learning. This is a substantial and important implication, touched on throughout the research. The final implication we draw from this research, can be found in qualitative analysis. The very nature of emerging themes has been restricted to students' words and analysis of data is therefore limited to the narratives themselves, alongside interpretations and reflections.

The research shows that what these students want and require is a sophisticated and highly-informed level of teaching when studying. Students report they require the tutor to be an experienced pedagogist. Much importance was placed by students, in the learning relationship on the tutor's ability not only to present and model skills but also to share practical experiences.

It seems from research interviews undertaken, the balance of support and challenge offered by the tutor is experienced by students as both facilitating and inhibiting. Use of self (by the tutor) thus becomes an important part of the tutor-student relationship and it is in this relationship that the teaching alliance is formed. Some considerable thought and preparation by the tutor for relationship with students is therefore recommended as being in students' best interests in enabling them to experience beneficially their learning journey.

Understanding students' views through this research has the potential to add to knowledge and contribute to a greater understanding of the subjective dimension of learning. One of the benefits of a positive experience in learning is that student receptiveness and motivation can be enhanced (Ramsden, 2003), which in itself is likely to lead to improved learning outcomes (Moulding, 2010). Qualitative analysis of students' interview data evidence student-centred emphasis seems more supportive to learning than tutor-directed course delivery, however also noting these are early entry students' needing to be metaphorically 'fed' by a didactic mode of delivery.

From the interview data and reflections, clearly some emphasis is placed on the relationship with the tutor, whether this is close or distant. Additionally, there is an appreciation of how external factors impinge on the learning experience and getting this right, that is so they did not negatively affect the learning process, remains a priority for the tutor. Thus, the general drive towards student autonomy (Furlong, 2003) has been seen as a preferable goal of the tutor, as well as being appreciated by students, although some awareness emerges of the rate autonomy is achieved, as some students state they want a period of nurturing and metaphorical feeding by way of feedback and tutor engagement.

Students of the course highlight the importance of the relationship with the tutor to their learning and this emerges as a clear over-arching theme throughout the research. However, students state they had little idea why this should be the case, other than meeting the basic needs, which includes being metaphorically 'fed' information (Christopher *et al*, 1992). To some extent this depends on students' prior knowledge and understanding, as well as their self-confidence in their ability to learn and self-efficacy to become cathartic (Osborne *et al*, 2004). It is interesting in this study to see the depth of importance interviewed students place on this relationship, for example whether students show this relationship to be the main factor, or equally so with peer relationships, or even simply as one of the main factors.

In conclusion, analysis reveals the importance of seeking students' opinions when designing HND courses. Students are in a social state when they engaged in studying and recognition is given '*...to the unequal distribution of power between those who teach and those who are*

taught...' (Mann, 2000:315). It is in understanding this power imbalance (Ernest, 2006) that underlines the importance of seeking students' views.

References

- Anderson, C. L., Dietz, M., Gordon, A., & Klawitter, M. (2004) 'Discount rates in Vietnam.' *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 52, 873-887.
- Anderson, E. S., Lennox, A. I. and Petersen, S. A. (2003) 'Learning from lives: a model for health and social care education in the wider community context,' *Journal of Medical Education*, 37, pp. 59-68
- Arnone, M. P., Small, R. V., Chauncey, S. A., & McKenna, H. P. (2011) 'Curiosity, interest and engagement in technology-pervasive learning environments: a new research agenda.' *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 59(2), 181–198.
- Balkundi, P., & Harrison, D. A. (2006) 'Ties, Leaders, and Time in Teams: Strong Inference about Network Structure's Effects on Team Viability and Performance.' *The Academy of Management Journal*, 49(1), 49–68.
- Basham, R. E., & Buchanan, F. R. (2009) 'A Survey Comparison of Career Motivations of Social Work and Business Students.' *Journal of Social Work Education*, 45(2), 187–208.
- Bates, R. (2019) *Learning Theories Simplified*. Sage Publication. London. P5.
- Bauman, M. (2018) 'Then and Now: The Relationship Between the College and the Student.' *Counterpoints*, 517, 411–422.
- Bell, H. M. (1996) 'College Students' Interest in Personal Development.' *Journal of Educational Research*, 29(7), 518–523.
- Bergmann, H., Hundt, C., & Sternberg, R. (2016) 'What makes student entrepreneurs? On the relevance (and irrelevance) of the university and the regional context for student start-ups.' *Small Business Economics*, 47(1), 53–76.
- Buckingham, W., et al. (2011) *The Philosophy Book (Big Ideas)*, Dorling Kindersley Ltd. Kindle Edition.
- Carter, N. M. et al. (2003) 'The career reasons of nascent entrepreneurs.' *Journal of Business Venturing*, 18(1). 13-39.
- Cassar, G. (2010) 'Are Individuals Entering Self-Employment Overly Optimistic? An Empirical Test of Plans and Projections on Nascent Entrepreneur Expectations.' *Strategic Management Journal*, 31(8), 822–840
- Chen, J. C. (2014) 'Teaching non-traditional adult students: Adult learning theories in practice.' *Teaching in Higher Education*, 19(4), 406-418.
- Cho, J. Y., & Lee, E. (2014) 'Reducing Confusion about Grounded Theory and Qualitative Content Analysis: Similarities and Differences.' *The Qualitative Report*, 19(32), 1-20.
- Christie, H and Munro, M., (2003) 'The Logic of Loans: Students' Perceptions of the Costs and Benefits of the Student Loan,' *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 24, No. 5, pp. 621-636
- Christopher, J. C., Bickard, M .C. and Lambeth, G. S. (1992) 'Splitting Kernberg: A critique of Otto Kernberg's notion of splitting,' *Journal of Psychotherapy* 29(3), pp. 481-485
- Clark, D. A., & Svinicki, M. (2015) 'The Effect of Retrieval on Post-task Enjoyment of Studying.' *Educational Psychology Review*, 27(1), 51–67

- Clark, L. E., Kara-Soteriou, J., & Alfano, M. P. (2017) 'Using Institutional Data to Predict Teacher Candidate Performance on a Certification Exam.' *Journal of Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness*, 7(1–2), 1–19.
- Corbin J. & Strauss A. (2008) '*Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE
- Davies, P. (1999) 'Half-full, not half-empty: A positive look at part-time higher education.' *Higher Education Quarterly*, 53 (2), 141-155
- Davies, P. and Williams, J. (2001) 'For me or not for me? Fragility and risk in mature students' decision making.' *Higher Education Quarterly*, 55 (2), 185-203.
- Dehaene, S (2020) *How We Learn*. Penguin Books Ltd. London. Kindle Edition. P241.
- Denzin, N. K. (1994) *The art and politics of interpretation*. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 500-515), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Desjardins, R. (2015) 'Education and Social Transformation.' *European Journal of Education*, 50(3), 239–244.
- Dey, P., & Lehner, O. (2017) 'Registering Ideology in the Creation of Social Entrepreneurs: Intermediary Organizations, "Ideal Subject" and the Promise of Enjoyment.' *Journal of Business Ethics*, 142(4), 753–767. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45022135>
- Elliot, A.J. (2006) 'The Hierarchical Model of Approach-Avoidance Motivation.' *Motiv Emot* 30, 111–116
- Emad, G. R., & Roth, W.-M. (2016) 'Quasi-communities: rethinking learning in formal adult and vocational education.' *Instructional Science*, 44(6), 583–600.
- Ernest, P. (2006) 'Reflections on Theories of Learning,' *ZDM* 38(1), pp. 1-5
- Fairchild, E. E. (2003) 'Multiple roles of adult learners.' *Journal of New Directions for Student Services*, 102, 11-16
- Ferrer, A., & Riddell, W. C. (2008) 'Education, Credentials, and Immigrant Earnings.' *The Canadian Journal of Economics / Revue Canadienne d'Economique*, 41(1), 186–216.
- Fotopoulos, T. (2012) 'From (Mis)Education to "Paideia."' *Counterpoints*, 422, 81–119.
- Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Middlesex: Penguin Books
- Furlong, M. A. (2003) 'Self-Determination and a Critical Perspective in Casework: Promoting a Balance between Interdependence and Autonomy,' *Qualitative Social Work* 2: p 177
- Gagnon, J. (2018) 'Unreasonable rage, disobedient dissent: The social construction of student activists and the limits of student engagement.' *Learning and Teaching: The International Journal of Higher Education in the Social Sciences*, 11(1), 82–108.
- Grier-Reid, T. L. and Skaar, N. R. (2010) 'An Outcome Study of Career Decision Self-Efficacy and Indecision in an Undergraduate Constructivist Career Course,' *The Career Development Quarterly*, 59, pp. 42-53.
- Grossnickle, E. M. (2016) 'Disentangling Curiosity: Dimensionality, Definitions, and Distinctions from Interest in Educational Contexts.' *Educational Psychology Review*, 28(1), 23–60
- Hassel, H., & Giordano, J. B. (2015) 'The Blurry Borders of College Writing: Remediation and the Assessment of Student Readiness.' *College English*, 78(1), 56–80.
- Hermanowicz, J. C. (2016) 'Faculty perceptions of their graduate education.' *Higher Education*, 72(3), 291–305.

- Hessels, J., van Gelderen, M., & Thurik, R. (2008) 'Entrepreneurial aspirations, motivations, and their drivers.' *Journal of Small Business Economics*, 31(3), 323–339.
- Hochfeld, T. (2008) "Influencing: It Is Our Role, It Is Our Duty": How Social Workers Unintentionally Reinforce Conservative Ideas on the Family Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity, *Family Politics*, 76, 92–104.
- Hong, S. (2011) *A cord of three strands: Organizing parents, schools, and communities for collective empowerment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education
- Ishimaru, A. M. (2014) 'Rewriting the rules of engagement: Elaborating a model of district-community collaboration.' *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(2), 188.
- Jarvis, P. (2014) 'From adult education to lifelong learning and beyond.' *Journal of Comparative Education*, 50(1), 45–57.
- Johnston, J.S. (2010) John Dewey and Educational Pragmatism. In Bailey, Richard; Barrow, Robin; Carr, David; McCarthy, Christine (Ed). *The SAGE Handbook of Philosophy of Education*. SAGE Publications. Kindle Edition. P105
- Kim, C., & Tamborini, C. R. (2019) 'Are They Still Worth It? The Long-Run Earnings Benefits of an Associate Degree, Vocational Diploma or Certificate, and Some College.' *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 5(3), 64–85.
- Levitt, R. E., (2005) *Research methodology and validation: a case study*, NSF-Sponsored Workshop on Proposal Preparation. San Diego, CA, 2005.
- Li, M., & Bray, M. (2007) 'Cross-Border Flows of Students for Higher Education: Push-Pull Factors and Motivations of Mainland Chinese Students in Hong Kong and Macau.' *Higher Education*, 53(6), 791–818.
- London, A. (2009) *The impact of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on job choice in Generation Y*. 4th Annual Siena College Student Conference in Business.
- MacDonald, K. (2018) 'A review of the literature: The needs of non-traditional students in postsecondary education.' *Strategic Enrolment Management Quarterly* 5(4), 159-164
- Mann, S. J. (2000) 'The student's experience of reading,' *Journal of Higher Education* 39, pp. 297-317
- McCune, V., et al. (2010) 'Mature and younger students' reasons for making the transition from further education into higher education.' *Teaching in Higher Education*. 15. 691-702.
- Merriam, S. B and Bierema, L. L (2014) *Adult Learning: linking theory and practice*. First edition. John Wiley & Sons. Published by Jossey-Bass, San Francisco. P25.
- Metzl, M. N. (2010) 'Review of 'The Self-Sabotage Cycle', *Journal Psychologist-Psychoanalyst* 30(2), pp. 44-46
- Minola, T., Criaco, G., & Obschonka, M. (2016) 'Age, culture, and self-employment motivation.' *Small Business Economics*, 46(2), 187–213.
- Mortensen, E. L. (2019) 'Being Care-ful Among Friends: The Ambiguities of Friendship in Exile.' *Etnofoor*, 31(1), 29–46.
- Mostafa, A.R.A. (2017) 'Creating a positive learning environment for adults.' *International Journal of Learning and Teaching*. 9(3), 378-387
- Noddings, N. (2018) *Philosophy of Education (p. iii)*. Taylor and Francis. Kindle Edition. P3
- Nonis, S. A., et al. (2015) 'Thinking Patterns: An Exploratory Investigation of Student Perceptions of Costs and Benefits of College Loan Debt.' *Journal of Financial Education*, 41(2), pp. 24–48.

- Osborne, M., Marks, A. and Turner, E. (2004) Becoming a mature student: How adult applicants weigh the advantages and disadvantages of Higher Education, *Journal of Higher Education* 48, pp. 291-315
- Osborne, M., Marks, A., & Turner, E. (2004) 'Becoming a Mature Student: How Adult Applicants Weigh the Advantages and Disadvantages of Higher Education.' *Higher Education*, 48(3), 291–315.
- Ossiannilsson, E., Altinay, Z., & Altinay, F. (2016) *Transformation of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education towards Open Learning Arenas: A Question of Quality*. In P. Blessinger & T. Bliss (Eds.), *Open Education: International Perspectives in Higher Education* (1st ed., pp. 159–178). Open Book Publishers.
- Papé, N. (2017) 'Students' understanding of how their private lives can encourage or enhance learning experiences, *Journal of Contemporary Development & Management Studies*, 5:2, 105-115
- Papé, N., et al. (2022) 'Motivation of Mature Students in undertaking Higher Education at a UK Independent Provider: the role of financial benefits,' (Submitted for publication October 2022).
- Petry, N.D. (2018) 'Rationale: the necessary ingredient for contributions to theory and practice,' *Construction Management and Economics*, 36:8, 423-424
- Quimby, J. L., & O'Brien, K. M. (2004) 'Predictors of student and career decision-making self-efficacy among non-traditional students.' *Journal of Career Development Quarterly*, 52(4), 323-339.
- Ramsden, P. (2003) *Learning to Teach in Higher Education*, Abingdon: Routledge Falmer
- Shabad, P. (1993) 'Repetition and Incomplete Mourning: The Intergenerational Transmission of Traumatic Themes,' *Journal of Psychoanalytic Psychology* 70(1), pp. 61-75
- Small, R. V., & Venkatesh, M. (2000) 'A cognitive-motivational model of decision satisfaction.' *Instructional Science*, 28(1), 1–22.
- Sparrow, S. M. (2018) 'Teaching and Assessing Soft Skills.' *Journal of Legal Education*, 67(2), 553–575.
- Stevens, J. (2014) 'Perceptions, attitudes, & preferences of adult learners in higher education: A national survey.' *Journal of Learning in Higher Education*, 10(2), 65-78.
- Stoessel, K., et al. (2015) 'Sociodemographic Diversity and Distance Education: Who Drops Out from Academic Programs and Why?' *Research in Higher Education*, 56(3), 228–246.
- Strauss A., & Corbin, J. (1990) *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Sturges, J., et al. (2002) 'A Longitudinal Study of the Relationship between Career Management and Organizational Commitment among Graduates in the First Ten Years at Work.' *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 23(6), pp. 731–748.
- Sutton, R., and Staw, B., (1995) 'What theory is not.' *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40 (3), 384–471
- Tate, D.N. (2020) *Learn, Enjoy, Flow and Grow: Using the principles of positive psychology to help find passion and meaning in life*, United Kingdom: Parallel Dreams Publishing.
- Thorstad, R., & Wolff, P. (2018) *A big data analysis of the relationship between future thinking and decision-making*. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 115(8), E1740–E1748.
- Valentine, S., et al. (2011) 'Corporate Ethical Values and Altruism: The Mediating Role of Career Satisfaction.' *Journal of Business Ethics*, 101(4), 509–523.

- Vetter, A., Schieble, M., & Meacham, M. (2018) 'Critical Conversations in English Education: Discursive Strategies for Examining How Teacher and Student Identities Shape Classroom Discourse.' *English Education*, 50(3), 255–282.
- Vila, L. E. (2000) 'The Non-Monetary Benefits of Education.' *European Journal of Education*, 35(1), pp. 21–32.
- Walter, S. G., Parboteeah, K. P. and Walter, A., (2013) 'University departments and self-employment intentions of business students: A cross-level analysis.' *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 37(2), 175-200
- Whitcomb, D. (2010) 'Curiosity was Framed.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 81(3), 664–687
- Yan, L. & Kember, D. (2004) 'Engager and Avoider Behaviour in Types of Activities Performed by Out-of-Class Learning Groups.' *Higher Education*, 48(4), 419–438.
- Zhu, Y., Rooney, D. & Phillips, N. (2016) 'Practice-Based Wisdom Theory for Integrating Institutional Logics: A New Model for Social Entrepreneurship Learning and Education.' *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 15(3), 607–625.