Becoming a Newman Foundation Year Student: Conscientization to Promote Democratic Engagement, Meaningful Dialogue and Co-operative Working

SARAH PARKES, LEOARNA MATHIAS and MICHAEL SEAL
with KAECE MCGOWAN and PHOEBE HALL
Newman University Birmingham

Reflecting the University's commitment to social justice and student formation, Newman's newly created Foundation Year in Social Sciences adopted a particular approach to programme delivery through committing to the principles of critical pedagogy. It was an intentional programme design to support transition into and across programmes. However unlike many traditional approaches to 'study skills' with deficit models of student development, it seeks to foster in students an awareness of the subtle injustices legitimised by the current education system: what Paulo Freire calls 'conscientização' or conscientization. Embedded within the curriculum of this new Foundation Year is an unequivocal invitation to students to challenge the structural inequalities that had previously operated to constrain their educational choices. This article is an exploration of the extent to which the first cohorts of students and staff have experienced this and reflects on the development of our programme. This contributes to the discussion of the approaches required in Foundation Year provision to create truly transformative student experiences. Taking a Frierean approach also entailed being committed to promoting democratic engagement, meaningful dialogue and co-operative working. Students are actively involved in the evaluation of the programme throughout, and through participatory workshops at the end of the programme. The learning we share here from working with our students includes vignettes from two 2017/18 Foundation Year students, Phoebe and Kaece, who offer their experiences of navigating University study via the Foundation Year.

Introduction

> We looked at our past and present educational experiences and this helped me to understand that I had not failed, I had been failed by the system, and how I would be able to overcome the aftermath of those failings. (Kaece)

At the 2018 Foundation Year Network conference in Nottingham, staff and students reflected on the first year of the Newman University Foundation Year in Social Sciences. Within this, the views of student Kaece above, serve as vindication of the explicit intention to provide students with an opportunity on our FY programme to examine the inner workings of the education system as they had experienced it. Through fostering a climate of questioning and critique, the aim within the FY at Newman University was to support students in developing their critical capacities that can be carried forth onto their undergraduate programme and beyond.

As Freire argued, 'the importance of education for decision, for rupture, for choice, for ethics' (1997, p 44) should not be denied; we should not be afraid to 'denounce, before we announce' (Jarvis, 2008) and speak directly to that which holds us back. To these ends we have involved students not only through traditional evaluative processes such as staff student consultative committees, but through a transformative evaluative process (Cooper, 2017). Transformative evaluation is an appreciative methodology that seeks to balance current deficit discourses and provide an approach that focuses on learning and practice improvement. It provides a framework that encourages learning through collective reflective spaces, with many of these created throughout our FY programme. The quotes used here were compiled with students' permission from transcription of their reflections during delivery of our presentation at the 2018 conference. During this, they were active participants, as indeed they were in the writing of this article.

Our Context, Our Intentions

Established in 1968, Newman University achieved degree awarding powers in 2012, having previously existed as a Catholic teaching training college and then University College. Situated in the south west outskirts of Birmingham, we are unusual in that 93% of our current student body – which totals around 2500 students – live within a 30-mile radius of the institution and commute daily for their studies (Parkes et al, 2017), with some 76% commuting up to 57 miles (Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018). Additionally, more than 50% of our students come from demographics least represented within higher education (HE) in England, with many being the first in their family to study at undergraduate level (Higher Education Statistics Agency, Table 1 and 2, 2018). As nearly all of the students attending Newman would meet the currently understood definition of 'widening participation', in a very real way, the term does not necessarily carry meaning to us as academic and professional staff in the institution. For Newman, Docherty's (2014) assertion that the university is for both those within, and without its walls holds true.

Newman University remains committed to the Catholic ethos that was part of the founding mission of the institution, and this, along with the nature of the student body, creates a determination within many working here to see the formation of the 'whole' student, possessed of integrity, values and knowledge. The University's Strategic Plan intends us to be an 'inclusive learning community in which we respect individuals and promote their growth into valuable members of society, able to contribute wherever they find themselves' (Newman University, 2014). We thus frequently reflect on our alignment with the broad and philosophical

understanding of the value of degree level study that our patron, Cardinal John Henry Newman offered in his seminal text, *The Idea of The University*: 'A university training is the great ordinary means to a great but ordinary end; it aims at raising the intellectual tone of society' (2008, p 206). For Cardinal Newman, a university education was, as he is oft-quoted, 'an end in itself' and not a product, weighed out and measured, valuable only in individualistic, economic terms (p 138).

Cardinal Newman's words may shape our thinking, yet we cannot deny that for the latter half of the 20th century, university level study within the United Kingdom has moved from being an elite system to one which nearly 50% of school leavers now enter. The substantial growth in both the number and type of institutions characterising the post-war years began even before Robbins' (Committee on Higher Education, 1963) now infamous assertion that a university education should be accessible to all who might benefit. Plate glass universities, post-1992 universities and now 21st century universities – such as Newman University – have proliferated. Firmly grasping the baton of this once Thatcherite agenda, the New Labour government (1997-2010) has embedded the notion of lifelong learning deep within our national psyche. Indeed, post-2010 politics is further preoccupied with 'narrowing the gap' in educational terms for those perceived as disadvantaged in our society. And yet our system can arguably be accused of continuing to sustain and reproduce the inequalities that marginalised some groups' experience in educational (and economic) terms, remaining a deeply stratified society (Leadbetter, 2010). In marketplaces, such as the one that now shapes HE in England, reputations count, even though meaningful comparison of one university with another remains, at best, complex (Brown, 2014).

So here sits Newman: a small University in an intensely competitive marketplace operating within a challenging financial and policy climate. Newman may always struggle to achieve the reputational standing that other institutions readily maintain in the subtle and not-so-subtle hierarchy that exists within the English university sector. Against this backdrop, we as practitioners recognise the pressing need to offer value to our students that concurrently supports the realisation of their aspirations and ambitions, whatever their starting points. Balancing market rhetoric with our ethic-driven motivations, university teaching is challenging when responding to our students' need for education to make a contribution to their lives. Thus as Neary suggests, 'we have… to think much harder about how to create a progressive and sustainable future … this means deconstructing the knowledge economy and replacing it with a knowing society' (2012, p 164).

It is against this complex political and philosophical backdrop that the idea of establishing a Foundation Year (FY) programme flourished at Newman University. Such pro-grammes are being introduced by universities in England for a variety of reasons: to help international students integrate and adjust; to help upskill students who are aiming for certain, often vocational subject areas; or, as in the present case, to engage with under-represented groups who might not otherwise meet the qualification criteria to access degree-level study. In researching the potential number of Newman FY students, we identified some 400 potential applicants who year-on-year were attempting to come to Newman, but, when meeting the barrier of entry requirements, were going to our competitors instead. These applicants were either those who had potential but limited level three credit, or those with little or no formal qualifications but relevant experience. This number, whilst modest for some, could nevertheless make a significant contribution to Newman's financial sustainability. For a University necessarily preoccupied with increasing recruitment and aiding retention, the FY programme made good economic sense (Thomas, 2012).

As a University needing to increase its intake, there was a timely coincidence between the commitment to social justice felt by many within the University's walls and the demand for growth placed upon us by the marketisation of HE. By way of a third leg to the stool, we as FY tutors brought a wealth of experience in widening participation and critical education contexts,

along with a determination to see critical, consciousness-raising pedagogy in the classroom. For us, there is a strong sense that 'collegial and mutualist behaviours can flourish in commercial environments' (Callender and Scott 2013, p 217). Thus, the new programme reflected these ideas strongly within module descriptors: here we explicitly invite students to examine the inner workings of the education system, to develop their critical capacities, and to foster a climate of questioning and critique to carry forth into their undergraduate studies and beyond.

Rethinking Student Retention and Transition

When designing the Foundation Year and, given the nature of our student body, we began by considering the prevailing attitudes towards student retention. This was because we know from research by Liz Thomas that '… non-traditional' students, which describes those entering onto the FY, '… spend less time in higher education institutions than their peers because they have other commitments such as family, employment and community, and are thus more exclusively focused on academic achievement' (Thomas, 2012).

For us at Newman, the challenges we encountered centred on how 'knowledge' relating to student persistence is created. Within the UK's university sector, student persistence is commonly understood and measured as 'student retention'. 'Retention' derives from a late Middle English word 'denoting the power to retain something', originating from the Latin 'retinere': to hold back (Oxford University Press, 2017). Thus, 'student retention' concerns itself with power, ownership and thus control of the student. Indeed, this is reflected in nationally defined terms within the sector by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE - cited in National Audit Office - NAO, 2007, p 5) in two ways:

1. The completion [or success] rate: the proportion of starters in a year who continue their studies until they obtain their undergraduate qualification, with no more than one consecutive year out of higher education.

2. The continuation [or retention] rate: the proportion of an institution's intake which is enrolled in higher education in the year following their first entry to higher education [on an undergraduate course].

These definitions, though part of the neo-liberal University landscape we increasingly find ourselves in, are limited (Thomas, 2011) and problematic. This is because they are underpinned by concerns of institutional sustainability, fed by an espoused moral stance in relation to high tuition fees (Broadfoot in Thomas, 2012) alongside institutional performance in a commodified system. They thus focus only on the institutional need for students to continue with their studies, rather than the individuals' experience and potential transformation as a result of engaging in university study. Moreover, these sector definitions do not allow for complex student lives and trajectories which might include periods of suspended study, the need to retake levels of study, transfer programmes with gaps in experience, or the desire to, or indeed need to, leave.

Early models exploring student retention have created problematic visions of what this is. These were based on the idea that retaining students is achieved only through the student's ability to maintain connections and share common values with others (Berger and Lyon, 2005; Walker et al., 2004) and as such, they focused only on social relations, negating how a student's other organic or material experiences may affect subsequent choices. Furthermore, such discourse also perpetuates a student deficit approach — a discourse of 'lack' through assumptions

constructed about the student's pre-existence — on their ability or demographic attribute. As such, they wrongly situate the 'problem' of student non-retention in relation only to familial circumstance, class, ethnicity, physical or mental health, prior educational attainment and associated academic aptitude, and/or economic status (Walker et al., 2004; Berger and Lyon, 2005; Goodenow and Grady, 1993). Such discourses via labelling thus reify that students are 'in need of fixing' and ignore the essentially 'messy' realities (Law, 2004, p 7) that are experienced within study, and constituted within a myriad of organic, material and social processes (Coole and Frost, 2010).

Researchers over the last fifteen years have, however, highlighted the complexity inherent in student retention discourse (Hutchings and Archer, 2001; Quinn, 2004; Yorke and Longden, 2008; Thomas and May, 2011). These acknowledge that use of 'retention' as a concept does not reflect the diversity of experience across students' lives. Consequently, there is agreement that the complexity of retention cannot be reduced: there is no simple answer as to how student persistence can be enabled because we cannot know in advance what the consequences will be of the various interactions students will have whilst in study. We do, however, understand that particular local changes can have far-reaching implications (Law and Urry, 2004, p 401), for the sector, university and individual, and it is within this site of 'local change' that we, as FY tutors are active. Indeed, we see student success as achieved through a variety of student belonging(s) generated at the intersection between the academic, professional and social spheres of institutional activity (see Figure 1).
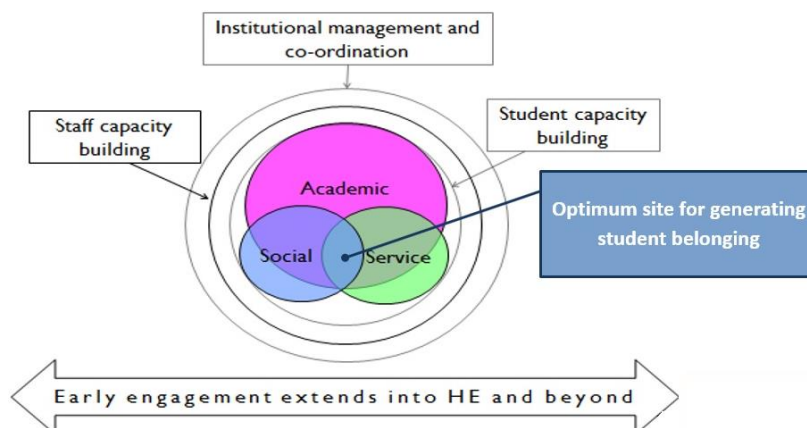

Figure 1. Student Engagement to Improve Student Retention and Success model (Thomas, 2012).

In recognition of the complexities of the worlds we inhabit and are subjected to, we find the notion of 'transition' a more helpful one than retention. In our use, it does not refer to a discrete moment of change in a student that enables them to persist, but a state of perpetual movement that occurs amidst 'irreducible difference' (Osberg, 2015, p 25). Thus, we subscribe to Gale and Parker's (2014) approach of Transition-as-becoming (t^3) that emphasises the complexities of life and the interdependence' of 'public issues' and 'private troubles' (Mills in Gale and Parker, 2014, p 744). This is distinct from the common approaches of Transition-as-induction (t^1) and Transition-as-development (t^2) described below:

- t1 is conceived as a linear progression through a number of 'phases' or periods involving pathways of inculcation. We see this view represented in the HEFCE Student Lifecycle model (see Morgan, 2011).

- t2 represents 'qualitatively distinct stages of maturation involving trajectories of transformation, from one student and/or career identity to another from one life stage to another', rather than conceiving identity as a continuous process of flux.

(Gale and Parker, 2014, p 738)

Transition-as-becoming, then, is created through the process of relating (Barad, 2007). This can enable exploration of student persistence as a perpetual process of flux that Quinn would describe as the 'unself' (2010, p 18): a 'creative chaos' (Braidotti, 2012, p 172) of flows, energies, movements and capacities (Grosz, 1994) that constructs possible futures (Braidotti, *ibid*). Within this, we can recognise that non-completion of university study is part of a complex cultural and social picture (Quinn, 2004). This therefore, necessitates a process of perpetual inward institutional reflection on our pedagogies and institutional processes (Parkes et al., 2014) that may inhibit the realisation of student ambition. This is not to say that we have completely discounted elements of t^1 or t^2 approaches: these help our students in the here and now. Indeed, we would say that there are elements of both these approaches within the programme. In our adoption however, the t^3 approach builds a more dynamic account of student transition where possible futures within the university are imagined that, rather than simply generating institutional spaces for different kinds of students, value the diverse knowledge and ways of knowing (Gale and Parker, 2014, p 741) that students already have.

The Pedagogical Approach and Foundation Year Structure

Our approach to teaching and curriculum design centres on recognising and valuing the students themselves as people coming into University who already have valuable knowledge. We therefore based design and delivery of the FY on the Swedish Folk High school Grundtvig model of education, often called Lifelong Learning in the UK. This sees personal reflection, growth and high levels of student determination as essentials. Here, we aim to provide a supportive learning environment which develops confidence and intellectual curiosity in tandem with the ability to manage working both as a member of a team and autonomously. Our approach to teaching therefore takes a dialogical position; it emphasises democratic development at both an individual and community level to reveal the incoherence (Bohm et al, 1991) or contradictions in our thought that are 'mutually constitutive' (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, pp. 33-34) where new ideas or directions can be achieved or imagined.

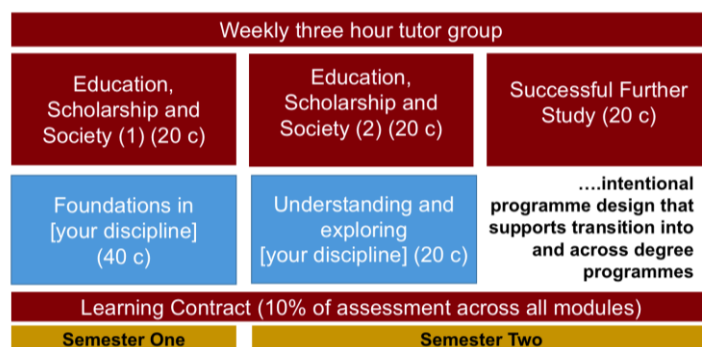### *The Foundation Year Structure: Core Modules*

Figure 2. Structure of Newman University's Foundation Year Programme.

Key to promoting meaningful dialogue and co-operative working are the Education, Scholarship and Society modules running across the programme (see Figure 2). Students are assessed via submission of a portfolio that contains a range of traditional and also unusual assessment types.

Figure 3. Examples of Educational Timeline.
Reproduced with kind permission of students

One example is the Educational Timeline (Figure 3). At the beginning of the year, both students and staff produce this to deconstruct their experiences of formal education to date. This is in recognition that people, including educators, have to unlearn what they have expected from education and that learning may have a bad association for many (Freire, 1972; Shor, 1992). For the students, this leads onto essays and presentations that examine what is needed to be successful at University, and challenges them to consider their views on what constitutes knowledge, education and learning. Students often recognise that the education system had indeed failed them, as Kaece describes:

> Through the time on the foundation year at Newman, I have realised the education system is very broken and I'm somewhere in between it all avoiding all the broken pieces, trying to find my way through it. The system definitely failed me because the foundation year has shown me I am not a failure. I used to see myself as a mess, a broken mess but now I feel I'm 'beautifully broken' and I'm finding my own way to find myself and what I can do.

Some felt angry about having been failed, as Phoebe suggests, but turned this positively into determination:

> The Foundation Year made me realize that the education system is more flawed than I had realised. On finally realising my potential, I still feel angry for being failed so badly, but it drives me to succeed; now I have found a place for myself in the system.

In these particular modules, we aimed to facilitate a process of deconstruction and then reconstruction of knowledge and power that investigates what universities are, who they are for and how they are structured. Within this, we are actively promoting a critical perspective by pointing to the socially constructed nature of our world (Allen, 2015) that, whilst not necessarily central to, 'is inextricably implicated' in, the construction of our realities (Maclure, 2013, p 167). Indeed, within the portfolio assessments, two items specifically aim to provoke discussion on the nature of our understandings of the world. The first is a presentation called 'Thinking Theoretically' which recognises that students have their own theories and ideas about the world which should be our starting place. Here, students are tasked with preparing a 10 minute presentation to discuss a theory of their own. Some students found this challenging but

nonetheless crucial in generating a sense that their viewpoints and ideas about the world are valued:

> …I started to feel academic during the thinking theory presentation where we had to come up with our own theory on something. This presentation made me realise that I had good ideas that were worth listening to. (Kaece)

Students also produce a glossary of words and concepts from HE as part of the semester two portfolio. On one level this helps them understand the terms they will encounter, yet also allows contestation that illuminates the political project behind the use of words. This challenges and deconstructs language: a central component of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1972). Students thus unpack and deconstruct academic language in recognition that it can make people feel excluded, and be an exercise of power, even if inadvertently.

At the end of the year, students produce a HE Collage (Figure 4) depicting what university is, could or should be, as well as what it has meant to them. This explicitly asks students to co-construct a future felt through the action of the imagination (Prigogine in Chapman, 2016, p 149). Assessed in the same way a Poster Presentation would be, students are expected to include reference to the key thinkers with regard to the idea of a university as well as current debates. This enables students to reflect on what this thing called 'university' is and means to them in a critical yet hopeful way that also supports the development of their own strategies to assist in the realisation of their ambition.

Figure 4. Examples of Foundation Year HE Collage Assessment.
Reproduced with kind permission of students

Embedded across all modules there is a commitment to supporting the development of students' academic skills such as numeracy, referencing, essay and report writing. Sessions are timed to coincide with assignment submission dates to assist students at a meaningful time, helping build confidence and a sense that they were 'academic':

> The psychology essay was our first large essay assignment (2000 words). By this point I found a subject I could write passionately about and had honed the skills to put my points across academically. (Kaece)

Other elements of the programme introduce students to the use of research skills, such as ethical considerations, and methods such as interviews. This is described as a pivotal moment by Kaece in her FY studies:

> The community profile and community plan helped me get a feel for the real issues impacting the community we chose to look at, and how we could help them within our field. It was a pivotal moment for me. Managing the dynamics of group work and producing and presenting work we were all really pleased with. By this point I felt like an academic and I felt like I could make a difference if I worked hard enough.

Discipline-specific Modules

Concurrently with the core Education, Scholarship and Society modules, students undertake two foundational modules relevant to their discipline: Foundations in [discipline] and Understanding and Exploring [discipline] (see Figure 2).

The first module, as the name suggests, gives students the foundational concepts for studying their subject at University, with a portfolio assessment to expose students to the range of assessment methods employed across discipline programmes. Within this, validation of what students already know is central to demystify and challenge the supposed superior knowledge of academia. Cho (2010) describes knowledge as 'democratic, context-dependent, and appreciative of the value of learners' cultural heritage' (p 315). As such, this evolving knowledge is created via an active, democratic process that entails interrogation of the world by all parties. Part of this entails lecturers actively undoing and subverting the power that the University, and students themselves, project onto them. Indeed, the power of this mutuality is recognised when Kaece comments on the aforementioned timeline:

> The educational time line that both students and lecturers participated in at the start of the year was crucial to the bonds and connections we made with one another. Everyone was so open about their journey and that really helped us to understand, connect with, and encourage each other.

Furthermore, as Cho (2010) suggests, when recognising that knowledge is contextual we understand that in many ways our students are experts of that context, have an essential aspect of that knowledge, and need to be a part of co-creating it (Batsleer, 2012; Smith, 1994; Ord, 2000). This comes through when teaching philosophy, for example, where students create ethical dilemmas for each other based on their real-life experiences. For politics, students present an aspect of the current political system they would change, and then defend this to each other. Bolton might describe activities such as this as 'paying critical attention to the practical values and theories which inform everyday actions, by examining practice reflectively and reflexively' (2010, p 56). However, this is not simply about acknowledging the diversity and multiplicity of cultures in the room. It may well entail challenging and changing cultural norms, as is the aim of critical pedagogy to reflect and act 'upon the world in order to transform it' (Freire, 1972, p 12). Indeed, many of our students start the course with a view that politics is not relevant to them. However, over time, this becomes a point of departure, investigating how they came to this view and who gains through such a view being prevalent amongst the demographic of the student body.

The second foundational module is concerned with the student's chosen discipline in context, requiring students to utilise the skills developed across the programme. In the Foundation Year in Social Science for example, student groups undertake a community profile to examine the demographics of a community to understand the concerns of the local residents

and/or services. Framed within social science, the purpose is to identify a generative theme that is of relevance to the community that ultimately leads to a development plan.

While this module aims to make the subject relevant to peoples' lives, it also draws on Freire's ideas of generative themes, whereby students begin to identify themes that enable people to make wider connections and to take action in the world. Generative themes have certain characteristics (Aliakbari and Faraji, 2011; Seal, 2017) that, in the context of this module, we have described below in relation to one student group:

1. They should be **a galvanizing force** for the community, something about which there is passion and feeling. For this student group, they identified that domestic violence was prevalent in their community.

2. **Tensions and contradictions** must exist within themes. Many tensions were identified that while prevalent, the community did not themselves want to talk about. In particular, domestic violence towards men was a difficult theme to discuss as it broke many cultural taboos about masculinity. A challenge here for the group surrounded keeping the tension there without becoming negative to transform their energy into a positive incentive for change.

3. Generative themes should **open up discussion about, and relate to, wider social issues to open up other generative themes** (i.e., one generative theme has the seed of other generative themes within it). Together, the group and community members recognised that the way masculinity was being constructed in the community was damaging to both men and women. They also concluded that within their socio-economic demographic, individuals were often left behind in economic terms, and abandoned by the state.

4. Finally, generative themes must have **the potential for action**, meaning that something concrete can be done about them. Recommendations and activities were devised to create different visions of what masculinity and femininity could mean, and how taking social action could articulate this to policy makers and local politicians.

The final module within the year is 'Successful Further Study'. Here, students investigate and make a case for the course they wish to go on to study. This includes conducting both desk-based research and interviews with lecturers and current students, as well as undertaking and reflecting upon direct experience of the teaching of at least two courses. The assessment is a poster that identifies the value of the discipline at University; why the student wishes to study it; what have they learnt about themselves as an FY student and how they will navigate their forthcoming degree programme. This aims to mitigate any mismatch between course expectations and experience when on the programme (Yorke and Longden, 2003) through dialogue with staff and students of the desired subject of study and direct experience of the programme.

Tutorials as Building Affective Relationships

We know that there is a renewed focus on personal tutoring within the sector, not least because of the contribution this can make to students achieving their goals (Thomas, 2012) in tandem with supporting university sustainability in relation to maintaining tuition fee income levels (Hixenbaugh, Thomas and Barfield, 2006). With the FY, we view our students alongside our staff as members of a diverse and inclusive learning community. Within this, we respect individuals and promote their growth into valuable members of society, able to make a positive contrib-

ution wherever they find themselves. Thus, through a weekly, three-hour student-led group tutorial we enact our commitment to non-formal adult learning and democratic development on an individual and community level. Here, students reflect on their week's learning in more formal modules to uncover and work with some of the consequences and tensions created by previous and current educational experiences. Students Phoebe and Kaece commented on the power this aspect brings to their learning, identifying the tutor group as a key facilitator:

> Tutor groups have definitely been a big help as part of the foundation year: it allowed us to bond so we felt we could go to each other for help.

> Tutor group, which was student led, was a smaller group that allowed us to be open about our worries. In this time, we could discuss assignments and find our own controversial subjects to debate and hone our discourse skills. This time and space gave me room to grow my own ideas and opinions.

This builds on the idea that learning needs to be rooted in the experiences of those undertaking it, with the content determined by the students in conjunction with the tutor. Indeed, materials and ideas for sessions come from and have resonance with peoples' everyday lives, including books, poems, films and adverts (Ohara et al., 2000; Kincheloe, 2005). This connection to their routine experiences and crises links to wider socio-economic forces, exposing 'both the reproductive nature and the possibility of resistance to problematic content' (Aliakbari and Faraji, 2011, p 80). Commitment to the tutor group is established through mutual assessment of each other's participation via what is formally known as the 'learning contract'. Negotiated at the outset of the course, this is well established in adult education, professional learning and critical education contexts (Kitto, 1987; Seal, 2017). As such, this is viewed as encouraging autonomy and independence in learning that fosters a general lifelong learning attitude.

Thoughts for the Future

The mature student base in social sciences at Newman University, whilst once strong, has declined in recent years. Although there has been an aim for 50% of people to enter higher education nationally as discussed by Adams (2017), those 50% who do not participate are not neutral. Despite recruiting well from Black and Minority Ethnic groups generally, we are less represented in terms of local black Caribbean, black African and white working-class students, with the cultural hegemonic forces dominant in higher education that make such communities alienated well documented (Blandford, 2018; Singh, 2011). We therefore plan to deliver FY programmes beyond the University in our local communities too. Expecting groups who have been acutely failed by the education system to walk through our doors, sit down in our classrooms to drive change is, we feel, unrealistic. Education needs to begin in the contexts where students feel safe and where their organic knowledge is valued and encouraged. Thus, it is our hope that our proposed partnerships with community groups teaching both out in the community as well as in the University itself, will help us to evolve, learn and further cement our position as a university committed to social justice.

Where we go now on campus as the University introduces other FY routes, is an interesting question. There are lessons for us regarding how we deliver the current Foundation Year in Social Sciences, and what helps students realise their ambition, as Kaece and Phoebe suggest below:

> If I could offer any guidance as to how to run a foundation year, I'd say be positive and encouraging, allow classes to be led by student discussion with your guidance to empower us.

> Offer information packs about finance given on initial acceptance on to the course, and informal correspondence or meetings delivered by former students or staff.

> Be patient. At times, I was a difficult student. I asked a lot of questions, I was confused easily, somethings I really struggled to comprehend, and I got highly frustrated on a semi-regular basis, but my lecturers had an abundance of patience with me, and I ended the year with a phenomenal grade.

> Be open, available, supportive and transparent. This encourages good staff and student relations. The lecturers' passion, patience, encouragement and approachability were a key factor to my successful studies. The way they tailored the course to increase in difficulty alongside reflective work, increased our confidence…

> Listen to student feedback. Our lecturers always took a great interest in our feedback, which also reinforced that our opinion was worth listening to and that we were appreciated, which combated the inevitable imposter syndrome most of my peers and I experienced.

> …student services helped with wellbeing issues and played a leading part in supporting me to find my own academic independence.

We are working hard to ensure that Newman's new FY routes take on the suggestions above, and are underpinned by the belief that many FY students have been failed by the education system. They thus need encouragement to unlearn any internalisation of this as a starting point and focus. Indeed, the FY experience is crucial as students cope with their disappointment and anxiety, as described by Phoebe and Kaece:

> At first when I heard I had got a place on the foundation year, I felt frustrated because I had studied 2 years of A-Levels. It was brutal to find out I couldn't get into the uni I wanted to and I was annoyed at myself, but at the same time I was nervous because I didn't know if I could do it because I had failed at A-Levels; university is supposed to be harder

> When I was first accepted onto the course, I was confronted with both negative and positive feelings. I found myself crying unexpectedly. This negativity stemmed from fear of commitment and having no idea what the next four years would consist of or if I was in fact capable of what I was taking on. The final fear factor was financial instability: being a mature student living independently and unable to work, I did not know how I was going to support myself.

Embracing and holding our students in high esteem is not a view held universally: why would it be? Academia is just as subject to the hegemonic deficit view of FY students as in need of 'fixing' as anywhere else. This makes the sharing of our approach to counter such attitudes within the University and beyond a primary focus for us. This journey is made easier, of course, by the number of engaged and articulate FY students willing to collaborate with us on such a cultural change: it is always their voices that are the most pertinent, powerful and meaningful. Indeed, despite the dominant deficit view of these cohorts held both within and outside the academy's walls, we can feel an authentic hopefulness for the future of Newman's Foundation Year programmes through the experiences that Kaece and Phoebe articulate:

> I have changed and grown more since starting the Foundation Year, than I have in the last six years. For the first time in my life I know I am intelligent, I know that I can do this, I am genuinely proud of myself and I feel capable.

> I'm finding my own way to find myself and what I can do … I am definitely confident within my academic abilities and it's a part of me that enables me to access many other things in life, it provides me with more skills than just writing an essay, it's given me hope for a better future again.

We are thus excited to see where our students take the learning gained through their experience of the FY, what they might now achieve on their substantive programmes, and the impact they will have in this next set of classrooms. This is not to say that we have empowered them: this implies that we held the power and have chosen to pass it on to them, in a somewhat paternalistic fashion (Peters, 2018; Roberts, 2015; Freire, 2014). Perhaps a more accurate picture is that we have aimed throughout to bring them into consciousness (Freire 1998), assisting them in the realisation that they had the power all along. As Kaece states, our role in supporting students navigating University study is to:

> …imagine [them] trying to learn how to ride a bike without stabilizers. As the lecturer, it's your job to hold the back of the seat, until we are confident and equipped enough to pedal our own way to success…

References

Adams, R. (2017) 'Almost half of all young people in England go on to higher education', *The Guardian: Higher Education*. 28 September 2017. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/sep/28/almost-half-of-all-young-people-in-england-go-on-to-higher-education (accessed 04.09.18).

Aliakbari, M. and Faraji, E. (2011) 'Basic Principles of Critical Pedagogy'. Paper presented at 2nd *International Conference on Humanities, Historical and Social Sciences*, IPEDR vol.17 (2011).

Allen, L. (2015) 'Queer pedagogy and the limits of thought: teaching sexualities at university', *Higher Education Research and Development*, 34:4, pp. 763-775.

Barad, K. (2007) *Meeting the universe halfway. Quantum Physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Batsleer, J. (2012) *What is Youth Work*, London: Learning Matters.

Berger and Lyon (2005) 'Past to Present', in Seidman, A. (ed.) *College Student Retention: formula for student success*, Westport, USA: American Council on Education and Praeger Publishers, pp. 1-29.

Blandford, S. (2018) *Born to Fail, Social Mobility: A Working Class view,* London: John Catt Educational Publishing.

Bohm, D., Factor, D. and Garrett, P. (1991) 'dialogue - a proposal', Infed.org: *Pedagogies for Change*. Available at: http://infed.org/archives/e-texts/bohm_dialogue.htm (Accessed 04.01.17).

Bolton, G. (2010) *Reflective Practice, Writing and Professional Development* (3rd edition), California: SAGE publications.

Braidotti, R. (2012) 'Nomadic ethics' in D. Smith & H. Somers-Hall (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Deleuze*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 170-197. DOI: 10.1017/CCO9780511753657.009.

Brown, R. (2014) 'The real crisis in higher education', *Higher Education Review*, 46:3, pp. 4-22

Callender, C. and Scott, P. (2013) *Browne and Beyond: modernising English higher education*, London: Institute of Education Press.

Carr, W. and Kemmis, S. (1986) *Becoming Critical*, London: Falmer Press.

Chapman, K., (2016) *Complexity and Creative Capacity: Rethinking knowledge transfer, adaptive management and wicked environmental problems*, Oxon: Routledge.

Cho, S. (2010) 'Politics of Critical Pedagogy and New Social Movements' in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 42: 3.

Committee on Higher Education (1963) *Higher Education Report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins, 1961-63*, London: HMSO.

Coole, D. and Frost, S. (2010) 'Introducing the New Materialisms' in Coole, D. and Frost, S. (eds) *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Docherty, T. (2014) *Universities at War*, London: Sage Swifts.

Donnelly, M. and Gamsu, S. (2018) *Home and Away: Social, Ethnic and spatial inequalities in student mobility*, University of Bath and The Sutton Trust. Available at: https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Home_and_away_FINAL.pdf (accessed 16 May 2018).

Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London: Penguin.

Freire, P. (1997) *Pedagogy of the Heart*, New York: Continuum.

Freire, P. (1998) *Pedagogy of Freedom*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.

Freire, P. (2014) *Pedagogy of Hope*, London: Bloomsbury.

Gale, T. and Parker, S. (2014) 'Navigating change: a typology of student transition in higher education', *Studies in Higher Education*, 39:5, pp. 734-753.

Goodenow, C. and Grady, K. (1993) 'The Relationship of School Belonging and Friends' Values to Academic Motivation Among Urban Adolescent Students', *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 62: 1, pp. 60-71.

Grosz, E. (1994) *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Higher Education Statistics Agency (2018) *Widening Participation Performance Indicators* Table 1 and 2. Available at: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/01-02-2018/widening-participation-tables (accessed 20.06.18).

Hixenbaugh, P., Thomas, L. and Barfield (2006) *Personal Tutoring in Higher Education*, London: Trentham.

Hutchings, M. and Archer, L. (2001) 'Higher than Einstein: constructions of going to university among working class participants', *Research Papers in Education*, 16:1, pp. 69-91.

Jarvis, P. (2008) *Democracy, Lifelong Learning and the Learning Society,* London: Routledge.

Kincheloe, J. L. (2005) *Critical Pedagogy Primer*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Kitto, J. (1987) *Holding the Boundaries*, London: YMCA George Williams College.

Law, J. (2004) *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research*, London: Routledge.

Law, J. and Urry, J. (2004) 'Enacting the Social', *Economy and Society*, 33: 3, pp. 390-410.

Leadbetter, C. (2010) *Education innovation in the slums*, London: TED Talks Available online at: https://www.ted.com/talks/charles_leadbeater_on_education.

MacLure, M. (2013) 'Researching without representation? Language and materiality in post-qualitative methodology', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26:6, pp. 658–667.

Morgan, M. (2011) 'Supporting student transitions', 24th International Conference on the First Year Experience 21-24 June 2011 University of Manchester. Available at: https://www.slideserve.com/deva/michelle-morgan-24-th-international-conference-on-the-first-year-experience-21-24-june-2011 (accessed 20.06.18).

National Audit Office (NA0), (2007) *Staying the course: The retention of students in higher education.* Available at: https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2007/07/0607616.pdf (accessed 02.06.09).

Neary, M. (2012) 'Beyond teaching public: the university as a form of social knowing, in Stevenson, H. Bell, L. and Neary, M. (eds), *Towards teaching in public: reshaping the modern university*, pp. 148-164, London: Continuum.

Newman, J. (2008 [1852]) *The Idea of a University*. Available at: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/24526/24526-pdf.pdf (accessed 04.09.18).

Newman University (2014) *Newman University Strategic Plan 2014-2020*, Birmingham: Newman University.

Ohara, M., Saft, S. and Crookes, G. (2000) *Teacher Exploration of Feminist Critical Pedagogy in Beginning Japanese as a Foreign Language Class,* paper presented at the University of Hawai'i.

Ord, J. (2000) *Youth Work Curriculum*, Lyme Regis: Russell House.

Osberg, D. (2015) 'Learning, Complexity and Emergent (irreversible) change' in Scott, D and Hargreaves, H (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Learning*, London: Sage.

Oxford University Press (2017) *English Oxford Living Dictionaries*. Available at: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/retention (accessed 20.07.17).

Parkes, S., Blackwell-Young, J., Cleaver, E. and Archibald, K. (2014) *Academic and Professional Services in Partnership: summary report and self-reflective toolkit*, Higher Education Academy and Leadership Foundation for Higher Education. Available at: https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/resources/prof_service_partnerships_toolkit_final_201214_updated.pdf (accessed 01.07.18).

Parkes, S., Cousins, H. and Brotherton, G. (2017) *What Works? Student Retention & Success Supporting student success: strategies for institutional change: Newman University* London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

Peters, J. (2018) 'The Pedagogy of Partnership in UK Higher Education: from Blair to Freire?' in Melling, A. & Pilkington, R. (2018) *Paulo Freire and Transformative Education*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Quinn, J. (2004) 'Understanding working-class 'drop-out' from higher education through a sociocultural lens: cultural narratives and local contexts', *International Studies in Sociology of Education*. 14:1, pp. 57-74. Available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09620210400200119?needAccess=true (accessed 04.08.2010).

Quinn, J. (2010) *Learning Communities and Imagined Social Capital*, London: Continuum.

Roberts, P. (2015) 'Paulo Freire and Utopian Education Review of Education', *Pedagogy, and Cultural Studie*s 37:5, pp. 376-392.

Seal, M. (ed) (2017) *Trade Union Education: Transforming the World*, Oxford: New Internationalist.

Shor, I. (1980) *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Singh, G. (2011) *Black and minority ethnic (BME) students' participation and success in higher education: improving retention and success. A synthesis of research evidence*, York: Higher Education Academy.

Smith, M. K. (1994) *Local Education*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Thomas, L. (2012) *Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change: a summary of findings and recommendations from the What Works? Student Retention & Success programme,* Paul Hamlyn Foundation. Available at: http://www.phf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/What-Works-Summary-report.pdf (accessed 20.01.16).

Thomas, L. (2011) 'Do Pre-entry Interventions such as "Aimhigher" Impact on Student Retention and Success? A Review of the Literature', *Higher Education Quarterly*, 65: 3, pp. 230–250.

Thomas, L. and May, H. (2011) 'Student engagement to improve retention and success model' in Thomas, L., and Jamieson-Ball, C. (eds) *Engaging students to improve student retention and success in higher education in Wales*, Higher Education Academy. Available at:

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/engagingstudentstoimproveretention_final_english.pdf (accessed 14.06.17).

Walker, L., Mathew, B. and Black, F. (2004) 'Widening access and student non-completion: an inevitable link? Evaluating the effects of the Top-Up Programme on student completion', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 23:1, pp. 43 -59.

Yorke, M. and Longden, B. (2008) *The first-year experience of higher education in the UK: Final Report*, The Higher Education Academy. Available at: https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/fyefinalreport_0.pdf (accessed 26.07.18).

About the Authors

Sarah Parkes co-wrote the Foundation Year framework at Newman University, and now leads on the core modules within this. She was project lead of the HEA and Paul Hamlyn 'What Works: Student Retention and Success Change Programme' at Newman (2012-16), the HECFE Catalyst Project 'Using Student Engagement data to inform pedagogic innovation' (2016-18) and is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Her principal interests lie in the factors affecting student transition, progression and success within a widening participation context. This includes an interest in the transformational approach to curriculum design and institutional organisation.
Websites: https://newman.academia.edu/sarahparkes and
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sarah_Parkes3.

Leoarna Mathias is Programme Co-ordinator for transition and retention programmes at Newman University. Having previously lectured in Social Policy and Early Childhood Studies, she is now exploring academic identity and academic labour in HE contexts as she works towards PhD completion, and has a particular interest in student-staff partnership working.

Mike Seal is a Reader in Critical Pedagogy, Programme Leader of the Foundation Years and community programmes at Newman University and Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. He has worked in social care, homelessness and youth work for over 25 years and within HE for 18. He is committed to widening participation and participatory research and has written extensively on the subjects.

Phoebe Hall and **Kaece McGowan** are Psychology and Counselling Studies (with Foundation Year) students. They have both successfully completed the Foundation Year element of their programme in 2017/18, transferring now onto their subject specific years in 2018/19.