

Pedagogy as Transition: Student Directed Tutor Groups on Foundation Years

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This paper explores the use of student-led tutor groups, viewed as central to the delivery of the Foundation Year in Social Sciences at Newman University. Aimed at 'non-traditional' undergraduate students, the programme in design resists the dominant deficit discourse of undergraduate transition. This means that we do not assume that students have failed in the education system, but that the formal educational and/or societal structures and systems within their experience up until the point of university study have failed them. We argue that foundation years should thus seek to support the perpetual process of our students' becoming; the constantly dissolving, diffusing and recreation of their subjectivity that is engaged in a perpetual process of flux (Quinn, 2010, pp 18-22). Mediating and working through these experiences thus requires an approach that enables teaching staff to respond according to the needs of a student group in any given moment. Our approach is influenced by a combination of the Swedish Folk High School Grundtvig model of education, critical pedagogy and Tavistock experiential group work. This has translated into a three-hour student-led tutor group that is responsive to student need, rather than requiring delivery of pre-determined, set content. Evaluations and student partnership work reveals that students see this as one of the transformative elements of the course that makes their experience coherent and provides a space for them to work through their previous and current constructions of themselves and their education. The paper goes on to explore the underpinning theoretical frames of these tutor groups, tutor roles, skills and experiences and student perspectives.

Introduction

At this year's Foundation Year Network conference (2019), we re-emphasised the pivotal principle of student-led tutor groups on Newman University's Foundation Year in Social Sciences. Derived from acknowledging that many students have been let down by societal structures and/or systems,

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foundation years particularly support students unsuccessful in previous formal educational environments and/or those returning to learning after a considerable gap. The vast majority of undergraduate Newman students could be categorised as ‘non-traditional’ and thus disadvantaged through a range of indicators as defined by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (see Tables 3 and 5, HESA, 2019). Many such students consequently internalise their previous educational experiences, diminishing their academic self-efficacy against the established order of university. They view their experience through a lens of personal inadequacy, natural inferiority, illegitimacy, displacement and shame rather than structural disadvantage (Mallman, 2016, pp 3-12). They thus see themselves as in deficit, becoming fixed in their mindset regarding their own ability (Dweck, 2014).

The complex and intersectional nature of this student body thus necessitates careful consideration of teaching and support practices. We argue that foundation year courses, therefore, should spend a significant amount of time deconstructing and reconstructing students’ previous educational experiences to resist such deficit thinking (Parkes et al 2018; Parkes, 2018) that positions them as lacking particular qualities. Indeed, they should seek to support the unique and unpredictable ways (Postma, 2016; Biesta, 2010) our students ‘become’ through processes of relating (Barad, 2007) to establish ‘epistemological equity’ (Dei in Gale and Parker, 2014, p 748) that enables us to seriously regard students’ assets (Gale and Parker, 2014, p 748). We, along with James et al., accept that the perpetual process of ‘becoming’ is complex, fragile and contingent. It is thus affected by a number of key personal, interactional and institutional factors (2013, p 9). To do such work, therefore, requires a questioning of the pedagogy employed within the curriculum that enables students to work through their previous and current experiences: this is the subject of this article. Indeed, there has been recognition of tutor group as a space to discuss fears, build confidence and explore what it is to be an academic; as one student notes:

Tutor group is useful for both personal and academic support. It swings between talking about academic issues and how we feel about those academic issues, confidence and not feeling like an academic.

Our starting point for creating an epistemological equitable space for deconstruction is the unsuitability of the traditional lecture: these are largely about knowledge transfer from lecturer to student rather than students exploring their own experiences. Instead, we argue that small tutor groups can foster understanding of our students’ autobiographies alongside discussion and reflection on their study experiences that, concomitantly, builds relationships between tutor, peers and mentors (Crowther, Maclachlan and Tett, 2010).

A Note on Method

This article is not intended to be an empirical one, rather a conceptual and theoretical piece. However, to articulate the concepts discussed herein, it draws on empirical data from three studies: (1) our previous article in the *Journal of the Foundation Year Network*, ‘Becoming a Newman Foundation Year Student: Conscientization to Promote Democratic Engagement, Meaningful Dialogue and Co-operative Working’ (Parkes et al., 2018) (2) a forthcoming chapter in the book *Hopeful Pedagogies in Higher Education: Dancing in the Cracks* entitled ‘Foundation Years: Undoing Discourses of Deficit’ and (3) an as yet unpublished internal research project exploring supporting students with mental health issues on foundation years. In this respect, University ethical approval

has been granted for these works, with consent for the examples and direct quotes renegotiated for this article.

Influences on the Development of Tutor Group

Andragogy

As espoused by Knowles (1990), the particular principles of andragogy seem a useful starting point in thinking through the approach needed to work with foundation year students. Aimed at adult learners, andragogy does not emphasise teacher mediation and knowledge transfer. Rather, the learner's own experience is seen as a rich resource for learning whereby they naturally move towards independence and self-direction. Here, the teacher encourages and nurtures this movement, acknowledging that adult learners are initially strategic in their learning through absorbing what they need to know to achieve the task they are undertaking. Learning programmes should therefore be organised around life application, with learning experiences based upon the students' own tacit understandings of the world around them, rather than curriculum subjects. In this way, students have recognised tutor group as a space where they could mediate their understanding of the taught sessions, and relate them to their own experiences:

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.

Based upon a Tavistock model of exploring group dynamics (Miller, 1990), previous work at the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) George Williams College drew on andragogy (Kitto, 1967) and offers potential in thinking through the synergies of the space created there, and that on the foundation year. There, in a way we would now recognise as classroom flipping (Baker, 2000), learning materials were sent to students to read prior to coming together every six weeks for discussion. From the first day, students were left alone to work out the agenda and how to chair the six-hour daily session. Tutors tended to vary in how little they said on any given day from a desire not to impose on the students their knowledge, style of learning, or interfere in their learning processes. There were thus stories of tutors not announcing who they were until the end of the day, or not even until the second day. Kitto says the veiled identity of tutors was needed because students in this instance were training as youth and community workers and, as such, would need skills that informally investigated knowledge in order to create meaningful structures for themselves and the communities they went on to work with. Within this model, it was eventually stated that the role of the tutor was to ensure "time, task and territory" (Kitto, 1967; Miller, 1990).

There is a translatability of this pedagogic approach to our foundation year context. The tutor role monitors the time bound nature of the experience, keeps the group on the task of examining a broad social science curriculum, facilitates the deconstruction of previous and current educational experiences, and offers observations on group processes. However, practically, theoretically and epistemologically, not all is captured in this description. Along with the above, students discuss the notion of their 'possible selves' that are drawn from and relate to past and future representations of 'self'. These are marked by their own sociological, cultural and historical contexts (Markus and

Nurius, 1986) that aids them in considering the socially constructed notions of identity and furthers reflection on their own 'becoming' within the context of the university. Through this process of deconstructing and reconstructing their experiences and understandings, the students and tutors create new knowledge about the nature of the world.

Critical Pedagogy

The notions of 'Critical Pedagogy' underpin much of our approach and experience of tutor groups. The ideas behind critical pedagogy were first described by Paulo Freire (1972) and have since been developed by authors such as Henry Giroux, Ira Shor, Michael Apple, Joe L. Kincheloe, Shirley R. Steinberg and Peter Maclaren. Growing from a concern amongst educationalists about the re-inscription of societal power relations through education, it combines a neo-Marxist approach to critical and educational theory. Critical pedagogy thus seeks to challenge traditional concepts of both knowledge and education in that it counters the hegemony that knowledge, and particularly theory, is something to be created or discovered by objective and neutral experts. Indeed, traditional approaches to education position the teacher as 'knowledgeable', imparting 'knowledge' onto students.

For critical pedagogues however, knowledge and theory should not be viewed as abstract concepts apart from everyday lived experience and available only to the few: knowledge is something created through dialogue with each other (Cho, 2010, p 315) that perpetually makes oneself anew (Barnett, 2008, pp 206-207) to result in consideration of new understandings. Such a site for this evolving knowledge can be conceived as a 'creative chaos' constructing possible futures (Braidotti, 2012) through an active and ethical democratic process. This entails interrogation of the world by all parties that concurrently enables students to become knowledge creators, "able to apply and synthesise new ideas and information into new ways of thinking as situations change and evolve" (Seal, 2017, p 28). Thus, the demarcations distinguishing experience, practice and theory are challenged, showing students they have a right, and indeed duty, to create new knowledge. Across our recent studies, students have recognised the importance of ideas coming from them, as opposed to their previous experiences that were less personal and more anxiety creating.

In class you filter what you say and your anxiety goes up, but in tutorials you see people every week and get comfortable with each other. It also comes from you, and it is more equal rather than the tutors always leading.

Some of the fundamental techniques within critical pedagogy, such as having a flexible curriculum with authentic materials, discovering generative themes and finding teachable moments, dovetail with our self-directed tutor groups. For critical pedagogues, students should be active participants in curriculum design that relates to their needs, interests, experiences and situations, including the material to be studied (Giroux, 2012; Shor, 1980). Commonly called "generative themes" (Aliakbari and Faraji, 2011; Freire, 1972), the curriculum needs to relate to the lived social and economic realities of the learner, shifting discussion on from a focus on micro-situations and crises, to wider social-economic forces that create such situations and their respective contradictions (Degener, 2001). These should galvanize students through exciting passion yet contain tensions and contradictions within them; things that confuse, anger or surprise that can be worked through within a group to potentially create something new through that resolution. In doing so, other generative themes may emerge. Finally, they must have the potential

for something concrete to be done about them, for action to be taken. For example, in the situation below a discussion of performativity ensued, leading onto further reflections on the constructed nature of professional situations and how one might operate within such spaces whilst retaining integrity:

xxx entered tutor group not in his normal attire but wearing a suit. After being questioned by the group, xxx explained he had a job interview which led onto discussions about normative behaviour for interviews: Why this was expected? Should we all 'play the game'? Did Mike's clothing contradict his beliefs? Did applying for a post as a reader (i.e. an expert) in critical pedagogy, a philosophy that rejects the concept of expertise, mean he was a hypocrite?

Critiques of Critical Pedagogy

In previous work, Seal (2009; 2018) stated that education should aid in the development of people's understanding of their situation, to explore what has happened to them and why. Drawing from Gramsci, Brito et al. (2004, p 23) cite critical pedagogues as encouraging students to "develop a critical consciousness of who they are and what their language represents by examining questions of language, culture, and history through the lens of power". This notion is described as 'conscientisation' and is, for some, problematic. The process can be perceived as having authoritarian tendencies (Zachariah, 1986), particularly viewing the tutor as ultimately determining the teachable moments and generative themes.

People nonetheless often have to learn how to ask, analyse and question, undoing a belief that their personal dispositions, cultural goods and skills have been perceived as naturally inferior (Bourdieu, 1984), consequently disabling their access to scarce resources (Lareau and Weininger, 2003, p 587). However, such perceptions are difficult to unmanifest: ways of knowing and/or knowledge are internalised as invalid, illegitimate or 'just' survival methods that are not able to be transferred to other situations. Such a dynamic in society that actively undermines oppressed people is the fundamental premise for critical pedagogy (Frere, 1972; Giroux, 2012; Seal and Harris, 2016; Seal, 2017). The concept of conscientisation is, however, in danger of assuming that disadvantaged students are subject to a symbolic violence whereby they have complicity participated in their own domination ([Mallman, 2016](#), p 13), unaware of their own oppression and thus in need of enlightenment by the educator. In particular the idea of 'false consciousness' presents those who are oppressed as not having their own sense of agency and awareness. Our position is that this view underestimates people, as Zachariah says:

Do ordinary men and women need to be conscientized before they recognize that they lead desperate, oppressed lives marked by hunger, disease, and the denial of dignity? They know the score and do not need middle class do-gooders to tell them. They acquiesce in their oppression because they have no other choice. (Zachariah, 1986, p 123)

In this regard, the work of Rancière (1992) is useful. Whilst the focus and who takes responsibility for consciousness-raising may need to shift, it remains pivotal. Educators, he says, should act under the assumption that all are intelligent enough to understand the world, and that, given access to resources, can discern the knowledge that will enable this understanding. He thus invites the tutor to become 'ignorant'; not that they deny their knowledge, or hide it, but they should not privilege their understandings. We should thus 'uncouple our mastery from our

knowledge' (Rancière, 1992, p 96) to imagine possible futures within the university that, rather than simply create institutional spaces for different kinds of students, value diverse knowledges and ways of knowing ([Gale and Parker, 2014](#), p 741).

The Role and Skills Needed for Tutors in Self-directed Tutor Groups

For tutor group at Newman University, our focus on the importance of people's ways of knowing is a long-term commitment necessitating a weekly three-hour slot over an academic year. This is envisaged as an approach that is 'with' people rather than 'on people', addressing matters of importance to students in a joint revisioning of our understandings of the world (Reason, 1999, p 208). What gives the tutor role its sense and integrity lies beyond explicit speech or words and enacts what Aristotle would call 'phronesis' in that it engenders a "practical wisdom based on the disposition to act truly and rightly" (Trotman, 2008, p 161). This rests on the notion that higher education – and fostering conscientisation within the foundation year – is in and of itself a public good where education is both a service to, and a right within, society ([Parkes, 2018](#), p 4). Indeed, such a role requires a critically reflective nature to attend to issues located both within us as tutors in a position of authority, as well as the socio-materiality experienced within the university. In this regard, we need to be aware of what McDonough, Reay and Reay et al. call 'institutional habitus'. This refers to the ways in which a cultural group or social class affects an individual's behaviour as it is mediated through an organisation and determines "... the way in which difference is dealt with, and thus the way students encountering difference for the first time react" (in Thomas, 2002, pp 431-439). Hence, our nature as tutors must be a reflexive one to account for the institutional language, organisation and expectation on students that can perpetuate the dominant cultures in society through processes and pedagogy that socialise and reinforce societal status (Thomas, 2002, p 431).

In practical terms, the tutor attends to those 'time, task and territory' issues whilst also addressing the students' self-belief and efficacy: this includes their willingness to engage and challenge themselves and others in the process of learning. This involves constant encouragement and showing that the students' intrinsic ways of knowing are legitimate and yet, will most likely need to be developed further. For STEM fields in particular, many argue that knowledge here is less contested and socially constructed. However, quantum physicist Karen Barad (2007) contends that 'scientific knowledge' is not somehow exempt from the constructions of the scientist:

...a thoroughgoing consideration of nature must include a concomitant consideration of the nature of scientific practices and vice-versa ... our ability to understand the world hinges on the fact that our knowledge-making practices are material enactments that contribute to, and are part of, the phenomena we describe (p 247).

There is, of course, always knowledge that students simply do not know and would need to know in order to progress on a degree and requires them to go beyond their ways of knowing to learn the canon of their subject. However, surely the task of undoing peoples' negative views of themselves remains one to be taken forward, especially when they may have internalised negative constructions about their own abilities to do things like maths and science. By encouraging students to move out of their comfort zone and reward their efforts, strategy and progress, we can change

our own and the students' view of their own sense of 'lack' (Dweck, 2014). To give an example in practice:

xxx worked with a group of students on a pupil referral unit who said they could not 'do' maths. Many were adept at adding up fractions, relating them to price and relative strength when it came to drugs. Similarly, they could apply both inductive and deductive reasoning in negotiating with whom, how and when drugs transactions took place.

The example links directly to the role a tutor must take in addressing, understanding and deconstructing both the language and concepts behind the arguments students use. This entails gaining access to often intellectual resources, but it does not mean the tutor determines the content of those resources. There can be a danger here of adopting a western-centric view of legitimate dialogue which in turn must be challenged through tutor reflexivity.

The Nature of the Spaces

For the most part, we challenge those who call for spaces to be 'safe' (Baber and Murray, 2001; Galbreath, 2012). We concur with Allen (2015) and others that say such a desire is fantasy (Britzman, 2003; Schippert, 2006) as our pedagogic spaces need to "de-construct and reconstruct pedagogical power and knowledge, in line with critical pedagogy's ambitions". Indeed, queer pedagogues such as Talburt and Rasmussen (2010, p 2) call for "spaces that reveal liberated subjects, liberated moments and political efficacy" that can be used to "teach our students how to look at the socially constructed nature of current events" (Allen, 2015 p 749).

In the threshold concept literature, the spaces where pedagogy happens is called liminal space (Meyer and Land, 2005; Land et al., 2014). An important element of the educational processes within these difficult and challenging spaces is the opportunity for the open expression of students' own views and attitudes, however unpalatable they may be to others. Such spaces are "holding environments for the toleration of confusion" (Cousin, 2006) and thus demand that participants find language to "swim with" or be "at ease" with regarding the troublesome tension, dissension and discomfort engendered by pedagogical exchanges. Furthermore, members of a pedagogical group need to be able to "contain" (Bion, 1961) the inner conflict or pain for both tutor and students that results from the disruption of worldviews and deeply held values that reside therein.

Authors such as Cousin (2006) saw the limits of critical pedagogy with its emphasis on the rational, universal and humanist perspective. Potentially, students could remain stuck in liminal states because of their intolerance of the irrational, the affective and the contextual. Thus, our narrative needs to take account of this, as do the spaces we provide to hold the irrational, the unknowable, the affective and the contextual. These can expose previously hidden personal identities, emotions and/or projections that need to be absorbed, detoxified and re-articulated. Managing such an environment should be shared between both tutor and students to prevent perpetuating inequalities and dependencies across the relationships within tutor group. We need to have faith that students have the resilience and emotional intelligence to do this, although, as with cognitive intelligence, we may need to work on their will to exercise it. To give an example in practice:

A mixed race cis identifying female student was challenging another student in strong terms about the privilege he had as a white man, which he minimized, and how this minimizing undermined her own experience. The group in turn helped the female student recognise

that, at times, she was projecting some of the pain she had experienced onto the male student and how both their strong positions did not always recognise the nuance of the trans member of the group's experience.

Hopefully this example illustrates the visceral nature of some of the pedagogic encounters in a tutor group. Pertinently the emotion, and learning and being are held by the tutor group, rather than depending on the tutor to intervene.

Deconstructing Power and the Concept of Knowledge

Stemming from a critical pedagogic stance is the need to actively deconstruct notions of power and knowledge in tutor groups. Harris, Heywood and Mac an Ghaill (2017) talk about challenging power asymmetry between student and tutor through high levels of non-teaching interaction, personal pastoral support (each student is allocated a personal tutor) and through tutor availability — a pedagogical priority. For us at Newman, this involves routinely involving students in processes such as recruitment, curriculum design, validations, etc. However, these could all be present within an authoritarian, paternalistic, approach: deconstruction needs to be on an epistemological and pedagogical level. It is in having a Rancierian (1991, 2010) pedagogical approach that we truly begin to break down power. At times this entails disrupting and challenging the systemic processes in higher education, such as the value and purpose of grading assignments and the sometimes limited scope (particularly in relation to students with very complex lives) of circumstances that can be deemed as 'mitigating' when it comes to submission of assignments. Concurrently we challenge constructions of democracy in education through a consumerist mindset as this is how our students have experienced it. This view is often exemplified by questions like 'What do I pay my fees for?' and especially in terms of a self-directed tutor group: '...I pay you to teach'. However, such comments offer a chance to develop discussion about higher education and its contradictions, itself a generative theme. When students resist the tutor group, it naturally leads to a discussion about the nature of education, knowledge, consumerism and the role of education in society.

Inter-subjectivity, Encounter, Recognition and Working in the Moment

Evoking Bourdieu's notions of 'habitus' and 'doxa', students may not value intellectual cognitive thought and challenging hegemony's assumptions. Thus, tutor group allows us to break down notions of 'the classroom' to challenge who is the learner and the learned, the nature of pedagogical relationships and who has the right to create knowledge. As noted previously, the creation of knowledge is a process of co-creation needing emphasis from the beginning of the programme and integrated throughout. Tutors and lecturers are required not to privilege their own intelligence and insights, but recognise them to be inherently partial and contingent. This can be difficult for some educators as it means, as Foley notes (2007), that they need to challenge the structures that they operate within including their own teaching and, fundamentally, the "power which is given to them through their titles" (Foley, 2007). To be a critical educator means challenging the power the 'teacher' has in the educational spaces they inhabit.

Akin to Schon's notion of reflection in action, students on the course are encouraged to think critically at a time when they are intrinsically motivated to do so, with both lecturers and other students. Becoming a student happens in the context of the classroom and within practice (habitus), within a certain culture of an expected pedagogy (doxa), and under the gaze of the lecturers and

other students. This gaze renders the constantly dissolving, diffusing subject engaged in a perpetual process of flux (Quinn, 2010, pp 18-22) as active in a process of recreating their subjectivity. Tutor group is thus an intersubjective endeavor that draws on individual experiences, but is nonetheless epistemologically 'performed' within a more collective context that explores the "inter-subjective, dialogical and dialectic processes at work" (Harris, Heywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2017). This emphasis on inter-subjectivity highlights existential notions of encounter, and intersubjective notions of recognition (Benjamin, 1998; Butler, 1990). Achieved by bringing theory into the visceral, embodied experience of lectures and small tutor groups, tacit and sometimes unconscious processes are brought into a learnable, theoretical framework (Harris, Heywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2017). Working to bring this process together in tutor group reflects the thoughts of Baizerman (1989) in:

developing the skills necessary to pierce one's taken-for-granted, ordinary, mundane life so that one becomes aware of how the ordinary is constructed and how one is implicated constructing one's own reality ... awareness of how one's biography pre-forms the present gives the student the possibility of seeing in the moment its manifold possibilities, not simply what is there. Done well, all of this slows down the instantaneous process of seeing and making meaning. Once slowed, the youth worker (and young person) can 'control' how she makes sense, and, in this way, come to be accountable to herself (p1).

Encounter and recognition (Benjamin, 1998; Butler, 1990) combine with elements of the 'engaged pedagogue' in hooks (1994). As such, all tutors, lecturers and students are encouraged to be open about their biographies including discussion of professional challenges within their own practice. This includes personally reflecting on experiences as members of privileged hegemonic or marginalised and oppressed groups. To give an example in practice:

A white tutor with a predominantly non-white group of tutees sat discussing the idea of white privilege. A particular mature, black student with whom conversation had been difficult asked to watch an episode of 'Red Table Talk', a talk show on social media hosted by Jada Pinkett Smith (a black female actress). This particular show was called 'The Racial Divide: Women of Color & White Women' and went on to discuss difficult relationships between black and white women from the perspective of black women.

This revealed some of the tensions that may have been occurring within tutor group in relation to the black women tutees and white tutor. The tutor thus acknowledged to the tutees that they hadn't considered the issue of female relationships in this way before. This then opened up a whole new discussion about depictions of race that would previously have been difficult to imagine happening.

Cultivating Hope and a Future Orientation

Agency is crucial in delivering effective tutor groups. As identified in previous research (Seal and Harris, 2016), structural pessimism leads to a knowing hopelessness that is far worse than an unknowing one.

Structural pessimism abandoned the young people in their state of hopelessness, rather than reinvigorating their sense of personal agency. As a result of highlighting structural oppression, some young people had developed a 'knowing' hopelessness, an informed sense of powerlessness, not one borne of ignorance of their potential or chances, but one that stemmed from knowledge of the limited nature of such chances. Young people were prone

to turn this hopelessness on themselves or their communities, become depressed, or lapse into conspiracy theories. (Seal and Harris, 2016, p 123)

On the course, a number of students have commented that our deconstruction of society, and higher education in particular, feels relentlessly negative. This has made us realise that whilst raising critical awareness, we also need to offer a sense of hope that ameliorates the bleakness of structural disadvantage. As Baizerman emphasises, experience of critical reflective spaces should be:

... a facilitating process in which an individual penetrates her taken-for-granted reality and, by so doing, comes to understand how reality for her is constructed. Thus are extended the possibilities of finding moments of (for) choice and, in this, for extending and living her freedom. Youthwork is a process of creating the opportunities for a youth to choose more often about more things in her everyday life and in this way more thoroughly construct herself. Choice is a freedom-in-action... 'Why?' does not matter; what is and what emerges does. Life is forward and is to be lived together, worker and youth, from 'right now' to 'next minute' (p 1).

However, agency and structure can be seen as distinct entities (Archer, 2010; 2012) operating in different temporal spheres, making it possible to unpick structure and agency analytically. First, structural and/or cultural factors need isolating and analysing to provide a context of action for agents. It is then possible to investigate how those factors shape subsequent agent interactions and how those interactions in turn reproduce or transform initial and/or current contexts. Archer argues that in doing so, it is possible to give empirical accounts of how structural and agential phenomena interlink over time rather than merely stating their theoretical interdependence. In this way, students do not develop a structural pessimism through seeing the potential for change. They acknowledge the changes that have taken place and the need for future changes: they have perceptible, realistic expectations through perhaps questioning and changing their own positioning, which, whilst appropriate and meaningful in an historical context, now requires evolution to prevent stasis. Sometimes these changes can be symbolic: such acts and achievements give people hope. Indeed, Reid et al. (2006) espouse the need for hope. Actions not actualised in the moment remain hopes for broader actions in the future even if the change needed is ultimately diluted to the point of disappearing: these nonetheless remain powerful symbols of agency. Students recognised tutor group as a space of both anger and hope, a place to develop a sense of agency:

Tutor group helped me understand my school experience and see that someone like me could make a success of education; it made me quite angry really, but now I want to do something with that anger.

Conclusion

We would like to invite colleagues teaching on, and designing, foundation year courses to consider the use of student led tutor groups as a focus for student learning, particularly where there are high levels of non-traditional students and specifically those who have had negative experiences of previous education. In adopting such tutor groups, the focus can be on:

- deconstructing and reconstructing students' previous educational experiences to resist internalised deficit thinking and negotiate the resources student will need to traverse higher education;
- exploring, deconstructing and reconstructing concepts encountered on the course;
- active, mutual, knowledge generating spaces, challenging more 'banking' models of education;
- discussing the notion of student (and tutors) 'possible selves' that are drawn from and relate to past and future representations of 'self'.

The role of a tutor is to:

- monitor the time bound nature of the experience;
- keep the group on the task of examining a broad curriculum, facilitating the deconstruction of previous and current educational experiences and offering observations on group processes;
- act on the students' will, self-belief and efficacy, the will to engage and challenge themselves and others, and to wish to learn, encourage and affirm students' intrinsic ways of knowing as legitimate, but as perhaps needing to be tightened and articulated;
- aid students to understand and deconstruct both the language and concepts behind the arguments they use.

Tutor group spaces may have particular characteristics:

- they may be visceral, pedagogic and liminal, rather than safe, though certainly not dangerous;
- they may have an emphasis on deconstructing power, both inside and outside of the space, and the concept of knowledge and its creation;
- they may have a process framework of inter-subjectivity, encounter, recognition and working in the moment;
- they may have an emphasis on cultivating hope and a future orientation, recognising an equal emphasis on reconstruction as on deconstruction.

There are still debates to be had on this topic, including the degree to which student led tutor groups are transferable to courses with more traditional students as well as to STEM courses. We suspect they are but this may have their own nuances and characteristics in these other contexts. We also hope that these approaches are transferable to courses more generally. Indeed, a couple of post-foundation students have come together to lobby their programme leaders to incorporate such approaches, as at heart they are about mediated knowledge transfer and creation as well as mediating previous negative experiences of education.

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