



University of Salford
A Greater Manchester University

Changing Identities: working class adults' voices in Higher Education

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Aims:

To introduce a research project with Access students

To introduce the concept of Site of Engagement

To explore agency as a key aspect of working class adults' engagement with Access courses and HE

To explore aspects of changing identity through the engagement



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Context

Research funded by Aimhigher Research Network NW and GMSA (LLN)

Nationally in 2006-07 a total of 37,840 learners were registered on Access to HE courses

Nationally and regionally the numbers have remained similar but the percentage gaining the qualification has increased (QAA (2008) Key Statistics:4)



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Numbers of Access students contacted from University of Salford's dataset

From a mail shot of 1980, using telephone follow up we contacted 780 Access students. This equates to 39% of the dataset and 10% of registrations for the period 2003-06. (OGN sub region 2006)

2003-04	609	24%	257(10%)
2004-05	602	23%	225 (9%)
2005-06	768	32%	298 (12%)



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Methodology

Data gathering

1. Mail shot
2. Follow up telephone interview/reminder
3. Face to face interviews
4. Transcriptions and notes written up

Data analysis

1. Thematic analysis carried out



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Interviews

Face to face recorded

Telephone written up from notes

Six areas early experience of education, the decision to study on an Access to HE course, experience of the course, experience of first year at university, intentions for future and important issues for adult learners.



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Site of Engagement

An important concept for the project (adapted from Scollon, 2001)

Involves two key aspects provision and engagement.

Provision = design, development and validation of course/programme (Access to HE (Health), Foundation Degree in Community Governance, policy and procedures for APL)



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Agency

An agentic act by an individual (in relation to learning) to enrol on an Access to HE course, FD or to engage with an institution's APL procedures. Related to 'mulling over' (Archer, 2003, 2007)

The site is where the engagement takes place but the decision precedes this act and is an aspect of the internal conversation. (reflexivity, Archer, 2003, 2007)



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The investigation of strategic decisions is post hoc. Questioning involves probing, listening, bringing an individual back to key aspects etc. in relation to early school life, the decision to alter or change and to engage with Access Courses that will lead to HE.

Questioning re experiences of HE;
as transition as a form of academic engagement and any effects on identity.



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Narratives of success

From the interview data 'narratives of success' have been Identified. These indicate a central aspect of change from early experiences of education. Decisions about Access are major changes in adults' lives.



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Narratives of Success

Institutional aspects of student support relating to HE study that are important – programmes of support and advice: academic writing, referencing, analytical skills.

Familial support and encouragement

Peer support within both Access course and the transitional period in HE



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The institutional support is important in years 1-2 until the adult is more confident and independent.

Familial can be short lived as the experiences in HE are outside working class culture and routines

Peer support becomes an integral part of both learner independence and identity change.



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As engagement proceeds aspects of lifestyle change as the individual begins to see themselves as a nurse, a social worker, an engineer a media manager or a computer scientist.

This identity change means a reliance on fewer friends and an increasing reliance on 'professional' friends and peers.

Such changes are seen as 'natural' as they are related to The context of study and work.



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References

Archer, M. S. (2007) *Making Our Way Through the World*. Cambridge: CUP.

Archer, M.S. (2003) *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation*. Cambridge: CUP.

OCN (2006) Greater Manchester Sub – Region Access Statistics.

QAA (2008) Access to Higher Education Key Statistics.