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Adults' learning: policy, pedagogy, and equity

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PhD on the basis of published work

University of Huddersfield

January 2019

Adults' learning: policy, pedagogy, and equity

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy on the basis of published work

University of Huddersfield

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Abstract: Adults' learning: policy, pedagogy, and equity

Lyn Tett (School of Education and Professional Development, University of Huddersfield)

This thesis includes and reviews six publications, drawn from the contexts of adult literacy and higher education, and sets them in the context of the learning of adults. There are two underpinning concepts that guide the thesis: that ideas structure the social spaces we inhabit through dominant discourses; that learning is socially negotiated, shaped by social structures and is part of a social process of identity formation. These concepts are followed by two main themes. The first is that conceptualisations of the relationship between policy, pedagogy and equity have a strong impact on learning because the dominant neoliberal discourse shapes the expected outcomes of education through its focus on the economic and this narrows the pedagogic options available to students. This discourse also leads to narrow conceptions of equity that focus on improving individual skills deficits so that people become more employable. However, although this economic focus favours narrow skills- and qualifications- based outcomes, practitioners have been able to resist these limiting outcomes by prioritising participants' own goals and including the affective dimension of learning. This results in a broad conceptualisation of social justice that prioritises change that leads to redistribution, recognition and democratic decision-making. The second theme is focused on changes in learning identities, which are conceptualised not as differences that are inherent to the individual, but rather as being created in interaction between the individual and their social worlds. This means that, although relationships of power shape what are assumed to be valuable practices, when knowledge and experiences are recognized and students are members of supportive groups then these assumptions can be questioned and changed.

Adults' learning: policy, pedagogy, and equity

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Introduction

This thesis investigates the impact of different conceptualisations of policy, pedagogy and equity, and their implementation, on the learning of adults. My submission for the award of PhD on the basis of published work consists of six publications, four that are single authored and two multi-authored works on which I was the main contributor and corresponding author (see appendix C for confirmation of my contribution). There were two main reasons why I selected these particular publications. One was the requirement to include a majority of publications that were recent and I interpreted this to mean within the last five years. Another was that I wanted the publications to represent the main strands of my research over the last twenty-five years, which has investigated the learning of adults in both informal and formal settings. Whilst the research is set in Scotland in my commentary I show why the findings from this specific location contribute to wider debates.

There are two distinct contexts for the research presented here: adult literacies education in informal contexts and 'non-traditional' students (that is people that are the first in their family to enter university and have not entered directly from school) studying in the formal context of a university (HE). My research in literacies has mainly focused on how negative learner identities can be changed whilst the HE research analyses how adults in an 'elite' university (that is a university that is research-focused and is highly selective in its admission of students) experience their learning journeys, especially its emotional dimensions (my publications since 2000 in literacies are listed in appendix A and those in HE in appendix B).

I did not have a traditional academic career. It was only in 1992 that I became a member of staff at Heriot Watt University and my interest in focusing my research in these two areas is a result of my previous career and my experience of formal schooling. The link to literacies comes from my employment as the 'adult basic education' organiser in Argyll and Bute (a rural area in North-West Scotland) from 1977 to 1987. The students that I taught there made me aware of not only the strong link between socio-economic disadvantage and

difficulties with literacies but also the emotional cost of not having the skills that are taken for granted in particular societies. My interest in ‘non-traditional’ students in HE comes out of my own experience as a returner to HE (via the Open University) following an unsuccessful school experience. I was the only pupil from my Bristol primary school to pass the ‘11-plus’ and my experience in the grammar school I attended was of failure to learn. I neither fitted into the dominant middle-class culture nor understood how I was expected to learn and these experiences parallel those of many of the participants in my research. Now the advantage of hindsight means I am able to see that I was disadvantaged because I did not have the underpinning knowledge and understanding that were assumed by my teachers. As Shirley Brice Heath argues ‘the culture children learn as they grow up is, in fact, “ways of taking” meaning from the environment around them’ (Heath, 1983: 49) and not a ‘natural’ way of behaving. Later in this commentary I will discuss how this insight has impacted on my approach to my research.

The submitted publications

The six publications submitted are as follows:

Tett, L. (2014a). Lifelong learning policies, paradoxes and possibilities, *Adult Learner: Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education*, 15-28 [**Lifelong learning**]

Tett, L. (2014b). Comparative performance measures, globalising strategies and literacy policy in Scotland, *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 12 (1), 127–142 [**Comparative performance**]

Tett, L., Cree, V., and Christie, H. (2017a). From further to higher education: transition as an on-going process, *Higher Education* 73 (3) 389-406 [**Transitions**]

Tett, L., Cree, V., Mullins, E. and Christie, H. (2017b). Narratives of care amongst undergraduate students *Pastoral Care in Education*, 35 (3), 166–178 [**Narratives**]

Tett, L. (2018a). Transforming learning identities in literacy programmes, *Journal of Transformative Education* pp. 1-19 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1541344617750277> (online) [**Transforming**]

Tett, L. (2018b). Does participation in adult literacies education lessen social injustice? In Milana, M. Webb, S. Holford, J. Waller, R. and Jarvis, P. (Eds.) *International Handbook on adult and lifelong education and learning*, Palgrave MacMillan [**Social Justice**]

A shortened version of the title of each publication is included in brackets at the end of the reference and hereafter the publications will be referred to using these short titles. The publications are in appendix D.

These publications have slightly different foci. **Lifelong learning** and **Comparative performance** are concerned with how policies can empower or constrain policy enactors and the subsequent impact on pedagogy. **Transitions** and **Narratives** analyse how adults can be

supported to learn in the context of higher education, particularly through positive staff-student relationships, and so contribute to the pedagogical strand of my research. *Transforming* and *Social Justice* are both set in the field of adult literacies and show how particular pedagogical approaches can enable students to construct a more positive learning identity about who they are and what they can achieve. These publications also discuss how particular conceptions of equity influence policy and pedagogy and how some of the negative impacts of these conceptions can be resisted.

I now go on to describe these individual publications, provide details of how they illuminate different aspects of the learning of adults and show the contribution to knowledge that they make.

The publications

The first two publications, *Lifelong Learning* and *Comparative performance* are focused on the way that policy in adult literacies education is conceptualised and its impact on practice. I was motivated to write these publications for two reasons. One was because, through my contacts with practitioners, I was aware that they were under pressure to provide more employment-skills focused programmes that they considered would be detrimental to providing a life-wide curriculum. The other was that I had been part of the team carrying out the Scottish Survey of Adult Literacies (St Clair, Maclachlan & Tett, 2010) and the outcomes of the findings of this survey had impacted on Scottish policy in a number of ways. Of particular relevance to this thesis was the finding from the survey that living in poverty was strongly correlated with adults' lower literacies capacities (ibid. 2). The revision of the *Adult Literacies Strategy in Scotland* (Scottish Government, 2011) incorporated this analysis of the link between living in an area of deprivation and poorer literacies competencies in its advice to policy makers and practitioners. Thus, unlike the equivalent English *Skills for Life Strategy*, the structural conditions in which people lived, rather than their individual deficits, were emphasised in Scottish policy as the cause of lower literacies capabilities.

The contribution to knowledge that *Lifelong Learning* makes is in rethinking the lifelong learning order. It does this through showing that when underpinning assumptions are not interrogated the result is that the interests of organised power are privileged in ways that shut out other possibilities. The paper comes to this conclusion by examining EU and Scottish lifelong learning policies and showing that lifelong learning is valued mainly because of its contribution to the economy. The result of this emphasis is that it puts people 'under pressure to constantly update their skills in order to take their place in a competitive workforce' (Tett 2014a, 21). *Lifelong Learning* identifies three underpinning policy fallacies: economic success equals eradication of deprivation and exclusion; failure is the fault of the individual; access to education is fair. It then interrogates these fallacies to identify the spaces that are available for practitioners to interpret the policies more radically. This more radical approach is characterised as emphasising structural inequalities rather than individual deficits and using a 'problematizing' approach (Freire, 1972) to the impact of social, political and economic factors on learning. An argument is then made that practitioners, rather than focusing on literacy students' deficits through concentrating on increases in narrow employability skills, could instead build on participants' own knowledge

and experience in ways that emphasises the participants' strengths. How this strengths-based approach might be enabled by particular pedagogies is explored more fully in the section on pedagogy later in this commentary.

There are clear links between *Lifelong Learning* and *Comparative performance* because both critique the assumption of the strong connection between a literate population and economic prosperity that is embedded in international and national policy documents through the underpinning human capital discourse. The difference between the two publications is that *Comparative performance* provides a detailed analysis of the decision by the Scottish Government to use a particular international comparative method to assess the literacy skills of Scotland's people. This decision is critiqued on two grounds. The first is focused on the use of a comparative approach based on large-scale international assessments. This is because these assessments come to be regarded as 'an objective irreversible "truth"' (Lawn & Grek 2012, 99) and the resulting performance-measuring culture affects national and local policies. This form of governmentality (Nóvoa, & Yariv-Mashal, 2003) then steers policy through what is an apparently objective international comparison. The second critique is of the assessment method used in the test. I point out that what it measures does not capture many of the practices that the Scottish government-endorsed national curriculum framework (Scottish Government, 2011) identifies as important. The combination of these two critiques evidences how the economic imperative in policy, which is to make nations globally competitive, results in tests that assess individual capabilities in ways that do not accord with a pedagogical approach that puts the learner's priorities at the centre of the curriculum. *Comparative performance* also provides evidence of the differences in how policy is enacted at the national and local levels. It shows that a particular regime of accountability required by the Scottish Government is reinterpreted at the local level because practitioners' professional culture prioritises social justice over narrow economic objectives. This detailed interrogation of the messy ambiguity of policy makes an important contribution to knowledge because it uncovers the processes through which policies are enacted.

The motivation for writing the next two papers, *Transitions* and *Narratives*, also arose from my desire to link research and practice. Both are papers from a project named 'From FE to HE' (led by Professor Cree, University of Edinburgh) where a group of 'non-traditional' students (that is people that are the first in their family to enter university and have not entered directly from school) who entered an ancient, research-intensive university in Scotland direct from further education colleges were followed over a ten-year period. The

project was designed to inform the university, the wider academic community and the policy community about students' experiences and outcomes. In relation to the latter one paper from the study - Cree, Christie, & Tett (2016) - formed part of a submission to the *Scottish Funding Council's Commission on Widening Access* in 2016.

The other two main objectives of the project focused on understanding effective teaching and learning, especially for 'non-traditional' students, as well as the students' experiences of assessment, support and learning in HE and beyond. These objectives led to (a) reports that were designed to inform the university of changes that it could make in its approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, (b) academic publications that would contribute to the literature on students' experiences and outcomes. The two papers ***Transitions*** and ***Narratives*** represent the academic type of output, are the most recently published, and include findings from the whole ten-year study (the other publications from this project are indicated by a * in appendix B).

The effect of international and national policies reported in ***Lifelong Learning*** and ***Comparative performance*** is also evident in ***Transitions*** and ***Narratives***, but the main focus in these publications is on how adults can be supported in higher education. ***Transitions*** contributes to the pedagogical strand of my work by demonstrating that a transition does not just occur when students are first inducted into universities. Instead the paper shows that transitions are multiple and part of an on-going process that develops over time and is affected by students' capacity to engage with, and become part of, the university community. The focus is on the social and academic circumstances of the students and how they are affected by the institutional system of the university. The paper uses a social-cultural perspective (Lave and Wenger, 1991) that conceptualises learning as involving people's changing abilities to engage in practice and understand why they do it and views learning as 'part of a social process of identity formation' (Tett et al 2017a, 391). Four transitions, or critical moments, are identified: the loss of a sense of belonging on coming to university; learning to fit in by the end of the first year; changing approaches to learning and belonging in the final years of study; and changing selves in the years following graduation. It is shown how, at each point, positive relationships with peers and staff made a significant difference to how these transitions were managed. Moreover, the paper shows that the changes continued to have an impact on the personal and professional lives of the cohort ten years after their first entrance. This paper makes a two-fold contribution to knowledge. The first is the conceptualisation of transitions as a process that takes place over time and is dialectical whereas much of the existing literature regards transition as a process of

induction at the start of a student's learning journey. The second contribution is to show in detail how students navigate their experiences of university over their academic career and the impact this has on their ability to see themselves and the world in new ways, which is also manifested in their personal and professional lives.

One theme from *Transitions* - that of the importance of relationships - is taken up in *Narratives* where the focus is on the difference that 'good relationships with staff can make to the student experience and the ways in which students navigate the complex landscape of support available to them' (Tett et al. 2017b, 167). This paper is set within the context of neoliberalism in HE where the argument is made that the monitoring of accountability and compliance leads to the prioritization of research over teaching, particularly in the most selective, research-intensive universities, and so less time is given to the needs of students. Moreover, when competition for external research funding is high it can lead to an 'organizational culture of egocentrism and a decreasing sense of responsibility to others, particularly students' (ibid. 168). This means that students are required to mediate the neoliberal audit culture with its emphasis on individual responsibility and the university's empathetic, caring spaces with the emphasis on positive relationships between staff and students. This paper demonstrates the power of metrics to measure performance based on what is important for market considerations and what is available to be measured and possible to quantify. For example, the National Student Survey (NSS) is one of the key metrics in HE but it does not measure the quality of teaching and its contribution to inclusion and good relationships that I consider to be the key values of education.

Narratives also shows how neoliberalism shapes the institutional structures and cultures in which caring relationships are enacted because the paper provides evidence that students also internalise the discourse of performativity and make fewer demands on academic staff. The result of this is that 'students are expected to be ... able to identify their own problems ...[whilst] the university offers [reactive] support ...that depends on the students having the agency to seek support in the right way' (Tett et al. 2017b, 174). This research found, however, that staff strove to create the supportive, caring relationships that would enhance learning through demonstrating their understanding of students' experiences. Personal relationships between staff and students recognised the importance of care of the emotional self within universities and the paper argued that the 'narrative of care has not been lost from view' (ibid. 176). This paper demonstrates that personal relationships are still important but argues that, whilst staff want to be able to support individual and collective well being, their role is such that students are expected to navigate the care they

need themselves. This finding counters, to some extent, the widespread assumption that the most selective universities are indifferent to these issues and illustrates the messiness of how staff interpret the competing demands of academic life.

In showing the importance of providing an education that emphasises care as a life-sustaining web of relations for students of varying abilities and interests (Tronto, 2010), both *Narratives* and *Transitions* make a contribution to understanding how the limiting discourse that reduces students to numbers and staff to economic actors might be resisted. These papers also make links with my research in *Lifelong Learning* on international policy discourses through the emphasis on the marketisation of higher education as well as the analysis of the impact of performativity discussed in *Comparative performance*.

The final two publications, *Transforming* and *Social Justice*, were motivated by a desire to reflect on my earlier research projects in order to develop more nuanced theoretical frameworks for understanding their findings. Both papers draw on earlier studies of literacy learners but with different emphasis. *Transforming* is focused on how particular pedagogical approaches impacted on participants in Scottish adult literacy projects whilst *Social Justice* investigates how participation in literacy education can contribute to alleviating some inequalities. These papers also link back to my other publications in their emphasis on the affective dimension of relationships and analysis of how power, discourses and practices are linked together.

The *Transforming* paper draws on data from my earlier research with community- and prison-based learners (reported on in Crowther, Maclachlan, & Tett, 2010 and Tett, Anderson, McNeill, Overy, & Sparks, 2012) but reanalyses the learner interviews using a range of theoretical resources. These theories are used to frame research into the opportunities that literacy students had to overcome their earlier negative positioning in relation to power structures, and how their changed literacy practices impacted on their lives. The main contribution to knowledge that this paper makes is that it brings together the theories of Mezirow (1991, 1996, 1997, 2006), Foucault (1990, 1991) and Holland and colleagues (1998) in order to understand how transformative changes in learning identities can be enabled. This is an innovative combination because Mezirow's theories of transformative learning, which are concerned with changes at the individual level, are combined with the insights of Foucault into how collective discourses are ways of constituting knowledge and social practices that shape personal worlds and are embedded in relationships of power. At the same time, Holland and colleagues' sociocultural model of language and literacy development is used to interrogate the students evolving sense of

their changing identities that are set within a broader social framework. All these theoretical frameworks enable the understanding of how particular pedagogical approaches, and the changed practices that result from them, can enable learners to construct a different, more positive, narrative of who they are and what they can achieve. I argue that this new narrative resulted from a pedagogy that enabled participants to ‘develop their ability to speak out, take risks, and think differently about their “old selves”’ (Tett, 2018a, 15). *Transforming* also shows that it is important to identify changes in the cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of identity, whereas many assessments of the impact of participation only consider cognitive changes in literacy skills.

The final paper, *Social Justice*, also draws on data from my earlier research on literacy students; from the same community-based projects used in *Transforming*, as well as a study of workplace learning in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) that was reported on in Algren and Tett (2010). These data are used to investigate how participation in literacy education can contribute to alleviating some inequalities. The chapter argues that particular conceptualisations of equality influence the policy structures, the expected outcomes and the pedagogical approaches used in literacy programmes. It uses Nancy Fraser’s (1995; 2003; 2008) conceptualisation of social justice through her lenses of *redistribution* (the principles by which goods are distributed in society), *recognition* (the ‘social arrangements that permit all members of society to interact with one another as peers’, 2003, 38) and *participatory parity* (equality of participation in decision making that ‘sets the procedures for staging and resolving contests in both the economic and the cultural dimensions’, 2008, 17) to assess how far inequalities have been alleviated. Using all three aspects of social justice means that the focus is on the ‘democratic assumption that people are equal in a variety of different ways but social structures operate to deny social justice to some whilst privileging powerful others’ (Tett 2018b, 371). This means that an individual deficit view of learners can be challenged because the focus is no longer on their lack of agency.

The chapter’s main contribution to knowledge is through its conception of equity and how different understandings of equity impact on policy and pedagogy. My view is that Fraser’s concepts provide a robust framework for analysing all types of adult learning in order to understand the wide-ranging ways in which inequalities are experienced and, as a consequence, on how injustices might be mitigated. I discuss different understandings of equity in education in more detail later in this commentary.

Now that I have provided an overview of my publications and how they are linked together in the next section I situate them in the broader context of adult learning.

The adult learning context

The focus in this thesis is on the learning of adults and the factors that enable (or disable) such learning with a particular focus on how conceptualisations of policy, pedagogy and equity impact on learning identities. In order to situate my publications within the broader literature this section provides a short account of the ways in which the purpose of adult learning and education (ALE) has been viewed in policy, then moves on to discuss inequalities in participation in ALE, and finally focuses on learning in the context of individuals' life histories (Alheit, 2012).

In 1926 Richard Tawney argued (at a meeting of the British Institute of Adult Education) that: 'although natural endowments differ profoundly, it is the mark of a civilized society to aim at eliminating such inequalities as having their source not in individual differences, but in its own organisation' (Tawney, 1926: 27). This quote demonstrates that the relationship between adult learning and its impact on people's social and economic conditions has been debated over a long period. There are two main positions: one emphasises individual capabilities and focuses on how people's skills, achievements and can be improved through learning; the other emphasises the impact of economic and social forces that exclude people from education and focuses on how these forces might be overcome through engaging in learning (see Tett, 2010). This debate about the purpose of adult education and learning is also reflected in the contrasting views from Fauré et al (1972, vi) and the EU Commissioner van der Pas (2001, 12) quoted in *Lifelong Learning* (Tett 2014a, 15). These views show that learning in adulthood can be conceptualised as an inherent aspect of democratic life - 'learning to be' (Fauré et al, 1972) - or as an investment in those that do not have the skills required by employers in ways that will ensure economic development (Tett 2014a, 16). More recently, transnational bodies such as the OECD and the EU have stressed the importance of the economic investment aspect of adult learning. For example, the OECD argued that 'skills have become the global currency of 21st- century economies' (2012a, 10) and, in the EU, investment in education and training was advocated on the grounds that: 'it is money well spent. Good education and training help promote sustained economic growth, as well as sustainable development' (EUR-Lex 2015, 1). But there is a silence in these documents about what economic growth is for, and for whose benefit it is generated (see Sen, 2011). There are other consequences of this focus on economic growth through increased productivity, because it means that 'standardised and measurable outcomes are preferred for demonstrating achievement' (Hamilton 2012, 171) and this narrows the

curriculum away from the focus on development and social progress advocated by Fauré and his colleagues. I will discuss this further in the section on policy, pedagogy and equity.

Another aspect of the changing context of adult learning is the shift of responsibility onto the individual in the expectation that they will make the choice to participate as long as they have the 'right' motivation. This, as Foucault (2008) argues, represents a fundamental break with previous understandings of participation because the adult moves from 'being an "object" of economic analysis to being an "active" economic subject' (p.223). It also means that ALE is seen as a private good responding to individuals' identified needs where, as I point out in *Lifelong Learning*, no attention is paid to how these individual needs are constructed and understood (Tett 2014a, 23). This means that it is important to understand who does participate in ALE although, as Rubenson (2018) points out, measuring participation is difficult because of problems in both defining ALE and measuring its boundaries. The original UNESCO (1976) definition of ALE included all forms of organised educational processes where the participants 'were persons regarded as adults by the society to which they belong' (ibid. 339) but more recently international surveys have sought to define it more narrowly. Although I have critiqued large- scale surveys in both *Lifelong Learning* and *Comparative performance* they do provide a way of measuring inequalities in participation across countries and social groups and so I now draw on findings from the European Survey of ALE (EC/Eurostat 2011) and the OECD's Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) (OECD 2016).

These two surveys have somewhat different definitions; the EU defines participation as involvement in 'any activities of an individual organised with the intention to improve his/her knowledge, skills and competence' (EC/Eurostat 2005, 20), whereas the OECD is focused more narrowly on proficiency in literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments because these 'have a major impact on how the benefits of economic growth are shared within societies' (OECD 2016, 17). Both surveys show that there are national differences in participation rates within highly developed industrialised nations; the Nordic countries consistently having the highest participation (67-65 %) in organised forms of ALE, whereas the UK, USA and Canada are in the middle range (58-56%) (Boeren, 2016). These rates appear to be linked to the way in which the purpose of ALE is conceptualised. The Nordic countries include democratic and environmental considerations, rather than solely economic ones, and see combating inequalities through ALE as important whilst the UK, USA and Canadian policies are much more closely linked to a skills-based agenda focused on the economy (Desjardins, 2016). As I will go on to discuss later in this

commentary this latter approach leads to a narrow curriculum that does not take account of the knowledge and experience that learners already have. These differences in national participation rates also illustrate the importance of taking account of the society in which learning takes place because, although individual learners may be unaware of the external conditions influencing their learning, these conditions have a strong impact on what provision is available (Illeris, 2004).

These international surveys also demonstrate the impact of socio-demographic characteristics on participation with older adults (55-65), people without qualifications and those that are not in employment, less likely to participate (OECD, 2016). This is not a great surprise and is the same pattern as that found in the Scottish Survey of Adult Literacies described above (St Clair, Tett & Maclachlan 2010). As Boeren (2016) points out, those that already have high levels of education are more likely to be comfortable in educational spaces and are also more skilled at accessing the opportunities that are available. In addition, people in the professions are more likely to have their employers paying for their continuing professional development. On the other hand, those with low skills, particularly in literacy, have the lowest participation rate in work-related training and education (OECD, 2016). Yet, whilst these surveys reveal the strong link between participation and people's socio-economic status, the reporting of the results focuses on the individual. For example, the OECD's press release of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) results emphasises the 'poor skills [that] severely reduce a person's chance of a better-paying and more rewarding job' (OECD press release 28th June 2016 <http://www.oecd.org/education/improve-skills-to-build-fairer-more-inclusive-societies.htm>). I discuss this 'discourse of individual deficit' further in the part of the commentary on the 'power of discourses'.

As Rubenson (2018) argues, a problem with measuring people's learning competences is that it focuses on what is easily measured or classified and misses out the wide range of purposeful learning that people undertake in informal settings. This leads to consideration of a final issue in the context of adult learning, which is that in addition to learning in educational settings, adults also learn from their lives. This type of learning is what Peter Alheit describes as 'learning as the (trans-)formation of experience, knowledge and action structures in the context of people's life-histories and lifeworlds' (Alheit 2012, 168). He points out that the educational processes we experience, structure and influence 'subjective life plans and experience' (ibid. 170) in our biographies. Learning from life is also shaped by earlier experiences and, my research has shown, that negative experiences of schooling can

have a strong impact on people's confidence in learning later in their lives (see, for example, Ahlgren & Tett, 2010). However, engaging in learning in informal settings can enable the adoption of new patterns of expectation and interpretation of these earlier experiences as I have documented in *Transforming* and *Social Justice*.

People also learn from participation in social communities and this shapes their experience and so not only changes the ability to engage in valued practices but also to understand why these practices are valuable. This type of participation is not just the acquisition of memories, habits, and skills, but also the formation of an identity as someone that belongs in a community (Wenger, 1998). This conception of learning as situated and 'an integral part of generative social practice' (Lave & Wenger 1991, 35) leads to the understanding that it is embedded in everyday interactions and not simply an individualist endeavour. Adults, however, bring particular frames of meaning that shape their self-knowledge, agency and learning and these resources need to be recognised for their potential to generate individual, collective and social change (Formenti 2018, 201). This insight is an important reminder that, although everyone learns from life, if those life experiences are neither valued by ourselves nor by others, then this has a negative impact on our potential. This means that, when people do participate in more organised forms of learning, their experiences need to be both valued and interrogated in order to bring about change. For example, a family learning project reported on in Crowther and Tett (2011), built on knowledge that supported what parents already did with their children but also asked them to 'think critically about their own school experiences in a way that avoided simplistic, pathological, explanations of failure at school' (p. 137). This also illustrates the importance of understanding the relationship between the social, emotional and cognitive aspects of learning (Illeris, 2004) rather than simply focusing on the cognitive as is the case in the international surveys. I will take up the issue of the overall relationship between learning and pedagogical approaches later in this commentary.

Now that I have situated my research in the broader context of ALE I turn to my approach to research and ethics. After that I provide an analysis of the contribution of the publications as a whole beginning with the theoretical frameworks, followed by an analysis of the connections between policy, pedagogy and equity and a discussion of learning and identity and finally conclude with my overall contribution to knowledge creation in the field of adult learning.

Research paradigm and ethics

In this section I frame my overall approach to research and ethics within the critical theory paradigm.

Critical Theory

All my work has been framed by critical theory because I am interested in not only critiquing society but also in changing it in ways that reduce inequalities. As Kellner (1984, 122) argues 'the ultimate goal and fundamental interest of critical theory is a free and happy humanity [leading to] the liberation of human beings and the development of their potentialities'. Critical theory seeks to challenge injustice and asymmetrical power relations by delineating the structures of power in society and outlining strategies through which resistance to these dominating structures can be accomplished. Within this paradigm my research has been focused on unearthing those knowledges that have been subjugated because they are regarded as 'local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate' (Foucault 1991, 83) and showing how they can be valued. This has involved challenging dominant ideologies so that their unexamined hegemonic assumptions are no longer seen as neutral. In my research I have rejected the claim that there are no alternatives to present institutions and practices and instead I have offered alternatives and creative possibilities throughout my publications.

Guba and Lincoln (1994, 105) argue that researchers adopt different paradigms (or basic belief systems) based on the answers to three fundamental questions based on their ontological, epistemological and methodological positions. These are:

1. Ontological position – What is the form and nature of reality?
2. Epistemological position – What is the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known?
3. Methodological position – How can the inquirer find out about what they want to know? (Ibid. 108)

From the paradigm of critical theory this means that my *ontological position* is of critical realism (Archer, 1995). This position holds that the understanding of reality is shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, gendered and racialised factors that are reified into a series of structures that are regarded as 'real' and so need to be subjected to critical examination. Research conducted from this perspective is affected by my social and political

position because, not only do we take up political and ethical stances, but we also inhabit them as human beings from specific historical and geographical locations. Social divisions and power differentials also have a strong impact on how reality is perceived so my research aims to understand and uncover how educational aims, dilemmas and practices are related to these wider structures.

Epistemologically my perspective is that there are no views from nowhere so the relationship between myself as a researcher and what I am researching is always mediated by values and both researchers and researched are interactively linked in identifying what can be known. The relationships between researchers and the researched often lead to more informed insights into how the problem being investigated can be understood because different views are brought together and evolve over time. This process also enables different constructions of the meanings of the problem to be brought together in a dialogical context so that the problem can be reconstructed (Griffiths, 2009). In my research I am particularly interested in listening to how students in both literacy and higher education contexts employ their practical knowledge and in how their normative attitudes to learning are embedded in particular understandings of their capabilities.

Methodologically the critical theory approach challenges the notion of value-free knowledge through emphasising subjective interpretations of phenomena and rejecting the proposition that there are universal and generalisable truths. This means that the most appropriate methods are dialogic and are designed to foster conversation and reflection. The methods I have used include interviews, focus groups and autobiographical approaches that ask people to reflect back on their previous life experiences as well as looking forward to their imagined futures. I also need to be critically reflexive so that I identify and question the existing assumptions that underlie my actions and the context for those actions especially when I interpret students' views. As Dyke and colleagues argue 'critical reflexivity acts as a mediating influence between the social context, structure and human agency' (Dyke et al. 2012: 835). This means I have to make informed choices about my positionality through asking critical questions and thinking through the entire situation. I have also recorded and transcribed all interviews and focus groups and ensured that more than one researcher reviews these texts independently in order to identify themes. This means that each individual interpretation can be seen and the resulting discussion provides an important source of new perspectives that can challenge me to rethink the basis of my decisions and actions.

I have also brought a dialogic approach to my analysis of policy texts although, in this case, the conversation is between the texts and myself as the interpreter. The methodology I have used is critical discourse analysis (CDA) because this provides a way to justify, guide and interpret the data I have collected from these texts. There are a number of approaches to CDA and I discuss my interpretation in more detail in the next section.

Ethics

At all times I have used the lens of critical theory to guide my ethical approaches as well as the principles endorsed by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) of:

- *'An ethic of respect* for: the person; knowledge; democratic values; the quality of educational research; academic freedom;
- *Trust ... within the relationship between researcher and researched'* (BERA 2018, 5);
- The acceptance of full *responsibility* at all times for my actions.

This means that all individuals should be treated; fairly, sensitively, with dignity and freedom from prejudice, and researchers should be mindful of the ways in which structural inequalities impact on all social relationships (ibid. 6).

The issues of particular importance in my research have been ensuring that:

1. Research participants are able to give informed consent to participate in, and understand, the research study;
2. Participants cannot be identified and the data they have provided are kept securely and no publication directly or indirectly leads to a breach of agreed confidentiality and anonymity.

Informed consent

Applying for ethical approval from the relevant University and the relevant bodies in which the research participants are studying has been the first step in obtaining informed consent for my studies. This is because the scrutiny of these bodies of the detailed procedures I will be using enables me to make them more robust. My overall approach has been to ensure that the impact of relationships of power between researchers and the researched can be mitigated in order that informed consent can be obtained. This has involved trying to create a dialectical relationship between participants and myself about the focus of the research and maximising the benefits to participants by, for example, ensuring that their views of

their programmes are fed back into improving their subsequent experiences or those of relevant others.

Informed consent has also involved ensuring; that participants are told why their participation is necessary, what they will be asked to do, what will happen to the information they provide, how that information will be used and how and to whom it will be reported as well as for how long it will be retained and how it might be used in any subsequent studies (BERA 2018, 11). Where there were follow-up interviews participants were reminded that participation was voluntary and of their right to withdraw at any time to ensure that they were still giving their informed consent.

In addition, for adult literacy participants, a trusted person (selected by the participant) was also invited to be present to offer further explanations of what was involved in the research. For HE participants the interviewers were not involved in any way in students' academic programmes in order to ensure that they would be confident that their participation in the research was voluntary and not in any way a requirement. In both settings, where possible, interviews were conducted in places of the participants choosing to ensure that they were on 'home ground', mindful of how power relations between researchers and research participants are influenced by location (Elwood & Martin, 2000).

To ensure that communication was easy I always provided contact details (email, phone, address) to all research participants so that they could easily discuss any aspect of the research with me. In addition I provided opportunities for feedback sessions about the progress and outcomes of the research where appropriate.

Anonymity and data protection

The precautions I have taken to avoid identification of the research participants have been to change identifying features in a number of ways including using fictitious names (sometimes chosen by the participants), numbers (where there is a small possibility that even a fictionalized name might lead to identification), or references to the type of setting (for example, community based or in a prison) in which the research was taking place. These different approaches have been selected to ensure that participants cannot be identified by association or by inference. All communications about the research with third parties (including the press and social media) have been carefully monitored to ensure that no data breaches occur.

I have ensured that data are kept securely, and that publication does not lead to a breach of agreed confidentiality and anonymity. This has involved the use of secure computer networks; storing data on secure premises; using password protection and data encryption; avoiding portable data storage devices such as laptops and USB sticks that can be more easily hacked; and anonymising records (as recommended by the National Foundation for Educational Research and BERA 2018, 25).

I have also communicated in my publications how my data collection and analysis techniques, and the inferences to be drawn from my findings, are robust in order to meet my ethical responsibilities to both the research participants and the community of researchers.

Theoretical frameworks

Because my overarching framework of critical theory leads to particular ways of understanding and analysing the learning of adults I focus in this section on two particular aspects: the power of discourses and the relationship between learning and pedagogy. My commentary is exemplified in the six submitted publications, but I also make reference to my wider body of published research.

The power of discourses

Throughout my publications I have used the concept of 'discourse' to analyse relations of power because of my interest in the critical. For example in *Comparative Performance* I showed how the hegemonistic discourse of the value of tests created by international 'experts' led to the adoption of an inappropriate measure for assessing the literacy capabilities of Scotland's people. The underlying premise behind 'discourse' is that ideas structure the social spaces we inhabit and this means that dominant discourses can exclude, marginalise and oppress other realities. Discourse is intimately bound up with socially embedded networks of power because it organises knowledge through a collective understanding of what constitutes 'truth' and so structures social and global relations through its discursive logic. In particular, I have drawn on the works of Foucault to explain the operation of discourse. For example, in *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) he argued that knowledge was not something that existed independently of language because all knowledge is organized through the structures, interconnections, and associations that are built into language. Foucault also pointed out that discourses play a key role in the social construction of reality because, as ways of constituting knowledge, they generate forms of subjectivity and the power relations that are inherent in such knowledge (Foucault 1990, 1991).

I have used the concept of discourse in several ways. First though the use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyse policy documents. CDA is a specific linguistic approach to understanding how language in text and talk functions in 'constituting and transmitting knowledge, in organizing social institutions or in exercising power' (Wodak & Meyer, 2016; 7). There are many approaches to CDA but my work is framed by the dialectical-relational version developed by Fairclough (2016), the sociocognitive approach developed by van Dijk (2016) and the recontextualisation of social practice approach developed by van Leeuwen (2016).

In all these approaches the underpinning assumption is that language is both determined by social structure and simultaneously contributes to stabilising and changing that structure (Wodak & Meyer 2016, 7). However, combining them has enabled me to identify the nature of the relationship between institutions and organisations (Fairclough 2016, 87), the integration of a discursive, cognitive and social component that includes the interpretations based on individual experience and socially shared understandings (van Dijk 2016, 84) and how 'discourses are ultimately modelled on social practices ...and different discourses...will includ[e] and exclud[e] different things' (van Leeuwen 2016, 138). The combination of these three perspectives has enabled me to not only address a critique made of Fairclough's model, which is that it does not take account of how relations between discourses and society are cognitively mediated (Wodak & Meyer, 2016), but also to focus on the social practices that show what is included and excluded. For example, in both *Lifelong Learning* and *Comparative Policy* I have used CDA to demonstrate how different discursive practices have major ideological effects in reproducing unequal power relations and also how such structures are interpreted and explained by different actors.

Second, I have demonstrated that our knowledge of what a literacy learner *is*, is modelled on their social practices (as argued by van Leeuwen, 2016) so the discourses surrounding these learners are ultimately based on what such learners are able to *do*. Negative discourses about literacy can change these *doings* by only emphasising what learners cannot do or by representing them as needy, childlike people (see Maclachlan & Tett, 2006). This means that different discourses will make sense of the same aspect of reality in different ways in the service of different interests. As a result, when the literacies that people actually use are examined, it is possible to shift the discourse away from viewing low literacy levels as a deficit in individuals. Instead, the variety of literacy practices that are used by people can be viewed as arising from a range of different contexts that make them locally meaningful. This emphasis on the importance of understanding how dominant discourses are taken up is present not only in my analysis of policies (in *Lifelong Learning* and *Comparative Policy*) but also in *Transforming* and *Social Justice* where I demonstrate not only how negative discourses are internalised by learners, resulting in their loss of self-esteem, but also how these discourses can be challenged.

Third, I have drawn on the sociocultural model of language and literacy development of Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) to analyse how collective discourses shape personal worlds. In *Transforming* I have used their model to show that literacy learners actively and critically interpret and enact discourses rather than passively accepting them.

Holland and colleagues' (1998) theory also enabled me to illustrate the differences between *positional* and *figured* identities and their relationship to the power of discourse. Positional identities are linked to power and status and are about the on-the-ground relationships of power that are 'mediated through the ways in which we feel comfortable or constrained when speaking, acting, or entering into others' spaces' (Tett 2018a, 4). Figured identities are related to culture and arise out of socially shared meanings where 'significance is assigned to certain acts and particular outcomes are valued over others' (Holland et al. 1998, 211). Creating these collective meanings means that alternative 'as if' worlds can be imagined where identities and agency are formed and transformed dialectically (Ibid. 49). Using this theoretical framework then enabled me to focus on 'how far learners have been able to overcome their negative social positioning through the use of symbols and discourses to construct a different, more positive, narrative out of their struggle with the problems they face' (Tett 2018a, 5).

Taken together these three ways of thinking about the power of discourses show that, although discourses impact adversely on learners, they are capable of resisting this power. I have also demonstrated the value of bringing together three different, but overlapping, theoretical approaches to the power of discourse and using these lenses to analyse the learning of adults.

Learning and pedagogy

Throughout my publications I have brought together a variety of theoretical frameworks in relation to learning and pedagogy that have enabled me to form a holistic view.

First, because of my overall critical theory framework, I have sought to show the importance of a critical pedagogy that goes beneath the surface meanings of individual learning in order to understand how it is embedded in social context and ideology. This means that learning requires 'recognizing the social and not merely the individualist character of the process of knowing' (Freire & Macedo, 1995, 95). I discuss the possibilities of a more radical approach to pedagogy in *Lifelong Learning* and show how using the 'problematizing approach' to knowledge advocated by Freire (1972) enables engagement in more democratic learning rather than learning that is controlled by the teacher. Researchers, for example Taylor (1993), have criticised Freire because he placed too much emphasis on class alone rather than showing how other factors such as race, gender, culture, language, and ethnicity intersect with class to frame people's learning in any social context. Because of this justified critique I have emphasised the importance of valuing knowledge derived from people's

structural and subject positions by drawing on their ‘funds of knowledge’ (González et al. 2005) in both *Transforming* and *Social Justice*. This has enabled me to present a more holistic understanding of the relationship between learning and pedagogy brought about by the acknowledgement that there are different ways of understanding our worlds.

My second framework relates to the relationships that are derived from participating in particular adult education communities. I have used the lens of socio-cultural theory, mainly derived from Lave & Wenger (1991), to show that learning is not only about mastering the techniques and tools characteristic of a practice but also about becoming embedded in the social structures of that practice. Lave and Wenger’s theory emphasizes ‘the inherently socially negotiated character of meaning and the interested, concerned character of the thought and action of persons-in-activity...in, with, and arising from, the socially and culturally structured world’ (1991, 50–51). From this perspective, significant learning is what changes people’s ability to engage in the practices that they value and enables them to understand why they do so. I have used socio-cultural theory to demonstrate that significant learning is influenced by specific pedagogical approaches in *Transitions*, *Narratives* and *Transforming*. In particular, I have demonstrated that when it is solely the tutor that has the power to attach value to knowledge this results in an impoverished form of learning because it prioritises an external view of what knowing is about. On the other hand, when the focus is on the resources, goals, and contributions of the learners themselves and foregrounds their own ways of knowing and understanding then learning is much more productive.

The final theoretical framework I have used is focused on the individual but draws on socio-cultural theory because the focus of the learning is on ‘the whole person in a social situation’ (Jarvis 2009, 31). This means that learning has to be seen as encompassing cognitive, emotional, social and societal dimensions. As Knud Illeris argues:

All learning always includes three dimensions—the cognitive dimension of knowledge and skills, the emotional dimension of feelings and motivation, and the social dimension of external interaction, such as participation, communication, and cooperation—all of which are embedded in a societally situated context (Illeris 2004, 82).

The relationship between these dimensions is illustrated below.

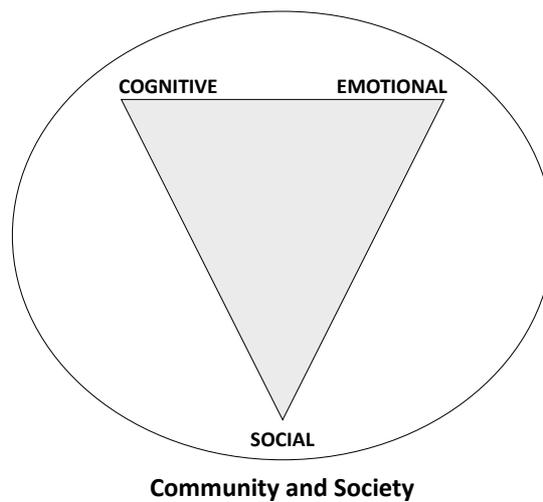


Figure 1: Supporting Learning (adapted from Illeris, 2004, 84)

I have used all these dimensions in *Narratives, Transitions* and *Transforming* to illustrate the importance of not focusing solely on cognitive changes, which are often the only outcomes that are measured in both higher education and literacy settings. Instead I bring together all three dimensions and relate them to the communities and societies of which students are part.

In *Transforming* I have extended this argument to include an analysis of what constitutes a transformative learning experience. This has been defined by Mezirow and Associates (2000) as changing habits of expectations so that a shift in the frame of reference is generated ‘that is more inclusive, differentiating, permeable (open to other viewpoints), critically reflective of assumptions, emotionally capable of change, and integrative of experience’ (p. 19). The importance of not focusing solely on cognitive changes in learning is brought out in this paper where one learner comments: ‘now I can read OK I feel more acceptable, not an outcast’ (Tett 2018a, 13) demonstrating that the cognitive, emotional and social dimensions of her learning are all intertwined. Putting these dimensions together with the societal context within which the learning takes place has enabled me to demonstrate the transformative potential of learning using the frameworks of both Illeris and Mezirow.

Now that I have established my theoretical frameworks in relation to the power of discourses and learning and pedagogy I turn to a discussion of the relationship between policy, pedagogy and equity.

The relationship between policy, pedagogy and equity

In this section I discuss how my six publications have contributed to academic debate in the field of adult learning through demonstrating the importance of understanding the relationship between policy, pedagogy and equity. I show not only how my research has added to the academic literature but also its impact on policy and practice.

Policy

The literature shows that policy in adult learning at the international, national and local levels has largely been driven by the neoliberal discourse of economic competitiveness, educational accountability and compliance based on the idea that a self-regulating market will operate efficiently and effectively (Olssen 2009). Yet, as Allais (2012, 259) points out, 'actually existing neoliberalism has not focused on doing away with the state, but rather on ... forcing state institutions to operate "as if" they were in a market'. This means that the role of the state is to provide the economic and regulatory conditions that favour capital and maximise profitability because, Sayer (2015: 16-18) argues, this enables a new common sense to be defined 'through a host of small changes in everyday life, [where] we are increasingly nudged into thinking and acting in ways that fit with market rationality'. Overall, the promotion of competitive individualism and the rise of an audit culture dedicated to measuring efficiency and performance have led to an emphasis on accountability through the measurement of specific outputs. These outputs include performance indicators, quality assurance measures, and academic audits that are then turned into measures of student retention, completion and employability in Higher Education (Raaper, 2017) and increases in employability skills in adult literacies education (Allatt & Tett, 2018). These measures of performativity are underpinned by Human Capital theory (HCT), which Gillies (2011, 225) argues, reduces the person 'merely to "human capital", not as a life to be lived, but as mere economic potential to be exploited'. Policy based on this assumption means that the purpose of education is interpreted to be developing efficient, creative and problem-solving learners and workers for a globally-competitive economy rather than as a means of promoting education's contribution to well-being (Rizvi & Lingard 2009, 86).

My research, reported in *Lifelong learning* and *Comparative Performance*, has been able to develop this literature and show how neoliberal discourses have had an impact on policies in the field of adult literacies. I have pointed out in both these papers how international policies have strongly tied the individual lack of literacy skills to economic returns to the nation and used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to demonstrate that OECD, EU and Scottish

policy documents all focus narrowly on the knowledge economy. For example, the OECD asserts that ‘without proper investment in skills, people languish on the margins of society, technological progress does not translate into economic growth, and countries can no longer compete in an increasingly knowledge-based global society’ (OECD 2012b, 3). This discourse also pervades EU policy documents where, as Brine (2006) points out, individuals that are identified as ‘knowledge poor’ are pathologised so that they are ‘simultaneously constructed as “at risk” and “the risk”’ (p. 656). *Lifelong learning* also shows that when the focus is on markets it is assumed that all citizens are equally able to make choices to participate in education whereas, in reality, it is structural issues such as educational under-achievement, limited educational opportunities, and the effect of class, gender and ‘race’ that make it difficult to participate in education and training.

A corollary of the focus on economic growth is the importance of measuring performance across nations in order ‘to contribute to the debate on the measurement of human capital indicators’ (OECD 2000, 62). In *Comparative Performance* I demonstrate that policy is often steered by the knowledge and information produced through comparability especially where league tables are constructed by international experts such as those employed by the OECD. This leads to what Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal (2003, 428) have called ‘governance’ where, instead of policy being governed by representative democracy, it is steered by more diffused networks of experts and assessed by peer review, international agreements etc. My publications have provided evidence to show how these apparently neutral assessments shape what is regarded as worthwhile knowledge and, in particular, emphasise the articulation between economic policies and education. For example, in *Comparative Performance* I demonstrate that the Scottish policy for assessing progress is focused on ‘increasing learners’ chances of obtaining employment’ (Scottish Government 2012, 18) even though the *Adult Literacies Strategy for Scotland* suggests that literacy practices should prioritise ‘learners developing capabilities in making decisions, solving problems and expressing ideas and critical opinions about the world’ (Scottish Government 2011, 7). By drilling down into specific policies, I have been able to make an in-depth contribution to understanding how discourses get translated into policy and in turn impact on practice by narrowing the options available to citizens.

My research has also been concerned with the impact of policies on the affective dimension, especially in the field of higher education, and this concern is echoed in the literature. For example, Craig, Amernic and Tourish (2014) claim that the isolation, increased work load, competition and competing value systems of most academics in the current marketised

university system has negative social and psychological effects on staff and subsequently on students. Leathwood and Hey (2009) point to the specific impact that the audit culture has on the emotions because the 'realm of rationality' (p. 438) presumed by a focus on the economic, limits the attention that can be paid to 'the politics and experiences of affect' (ibid.). Others have argued (for example, Lynch 2015) that the reduction of individuals to solely economic actors not only removes the importance of relationships in learning, but also leads to an organisational culture of egocentrism and a decreasing sense of responsibility to others, especially students. This is particularly evident in the substantial change that has been noted in the division of labour between researching and teaching, where the former is related to more rewards such as funding, promotion and recognition (see for example, Slaughter & Leslie 2001). It is also argued (Kelly & Burrows 2011) that the neoliberal university invites students to see themselves as self-interested and instrumentally minded clients and consumers.

The *Transitions* and *Narratives* papers take this existing research further by exploring the importance of changes in the affective realm on students that are experiencing rapid social shifts in their understandings and emotions during their university journeys. In these publications I have been able to show, through the longitudinal study that the research team conducted, the detailed impact of neoliberal policy discourses over time particularly on the students' learning identities. Both papers also show how educational discourses shape and influence outcomes so, in a culture where staff have to give priority to research and students are focused on the outcomes of their studies, an emphasis is placed on performativity rather than affect. And this is detrimental to both staff and students.

In my publications I argue, however, that whilst policies for adult learning provide a framework within which actions are situated, it is not simply implemented but enacted so that it is related to local practices. This enactment is a process of interpretation conducted by a diverse range of policy actors across a wide variety of situations and practices (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 21). The result is that policies at the international, national and local levels are translated according to the dynamics of the prevailing situated, material and external contexts (ibid. 20). My publications have provided examples of how this operates in practice in adult literacies education in *Comparative performance* and in Higher Education in *Transitions* and *Narratives*. These examples show that organisational cultures interact with professional cultures in ways that are influenced by community and society and that 'there is no linear flow from the global influence to the local' (Raaper 2017, 436) Moreover, I have demonstrated how local actions can, to some extent, challenge and alter these global

patterns. Despite the stress on performativity and the emphasis on 'results' in terms of measured outputs in policy documents, my publications have shown how staff can interpret policies in accordance with their own values. For example, in *Comparative Policy and Transforming*, I have demonstrated that, although the focus on the economic favours narrow skills based outcomes, practitioners in literacy education have been able to develop curricula that emphasise the learners own goals. In higher education, my publications have demonstrated the importance of relationships of trust between staff and students that transcend the neoliberal assumption that the university is a market place where relationships are simply a form of economic transaction.

I now turn to a discussion of the impact of policy on pedagogical approaches in order to show why understanding this relationship is important, how it operates and how it is enacted at the local level.

Pedagogy

Pedagogy can be broadly defined as the theory and practice of education and their combined impact on learning. Pedagogies are not neutral because they emerge from different economic, social, political and cultural contexts and are thus strongly influenced by policy (Freire, 1972). In this section I show how my publications have made links between the policy discourses outlined above and their impact on pedagogy even though policies rarely explicitly require particular pedagogical approaches to education.

There are a number of ways of thinking about pedagogical approaches. Zepke and Leach distinguish between pedagogies designed to ensure integration and assimilation into society on the one hand and those that 'adapt to the challenges posed by learner diversity' (2006, 509) on the other. Burke (2015) takes this argument further by pointing out how 'pedagogies are formed through intersecting and embodied classed, gendered and racialised subjectivities ... [that conceal] the ways that educational encounters form subjectivities, ways of being and doing' (2015, 391). She is particularly concerned with how minorities are constructed as a problem and are positioned as lacking aspiration, motivation, confidence and so on rather than as people that have important knowledge and experience to offer. My publications in adult literacies (particularly *Transforming*) have further developed Burke's (2015) research to show how this construction is experienced by students especially when pedagogies are used that limit the possibilities open to them. I argue that when the focus is on the economic worth of the individual, policies limit the curriculum at the national and local level because the policies focus on 'up-skilling' people so that they become more

employable. Because this approach presupposes that the individual lacks skills it ignores their knowledge and so emphasises their limitations rather than their expertise (Tett, Hamilton, & Crowther 2012). As I have shown in my research this can lead to a narrow conceptualisation of the purpose of literacy education as the provider of 'employment ready' workers. This approach leads to a curriculum that is focused on delivering the information-processing skills claimed to be necessary for employment and the outcomes that are prioritised are: gaining employment; taking part in other forms of work-related experience; or obtaining qualifications.

Transforming, has also shown that the pedagogical approaches that are more effective are those based on the view that people have important 'funds of knowledge' (González et al, 2005) to contribute to education. This approach is successful because it focuses on the resources and practices that learners bring and so builds on, rather than denigrating, their expertise. When an 'inquiry method of teaching' (González et al, 2005, p. 19) is used, where participants are actively involved in developing their lived experiences, these become validated as legitimate sources of knowledge both inside and outside of programmes. Moreover, when participants can influence the curriculum to make it relevant to their lived experiences this can provide valuable resources for their emotional and social development (Baquedano-López et al, 2013). I show in **Transforming** how the funds of knowledge approach shifts more agency to learners as meaning-makers rather than receivers of expert instruction. This is an important contribution to knowledge because the paper provides details of the impact of these changes in agentic action from students in the two different contexts of communities and prisons. Both **Transforming** and **Social Justice** also demonstrate that participating in literacy programmes that build on learners own knowledge, leads to increasing skills, confidence and self-respect. This means that participants are more likely to develop their economic, social and cultural capitals in ways that satisfy their own aspirations and are likely to result in positive changes in learners sense of self-efficacy.

Another way in which my publications in the field of literacies have made a pedagogical contribution, which is also linked to policy, is alluded to in **Comparative Performance**. In that publication I briefly outline the Scottish 'social practices' approach to literacies tuition (p. 133) and also refer to my role as the Principal Investigator on a number of Scottish Government Research Projects (p. 129). This close involvement with policy makers has enabled me to influence the pedagogical approaches used in community-based contexts through leading the development of the initial *Adult Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum*

Framework for Scotland (Learning Connections, 2005) and contributing to its subsequent updating in *Scotland's Adult Literacies Curriculum Framework Guidelines* (Education Scotland, 2016). The pedagogical approach used in Scotland has arisen from research and practice (see Barton 2007; Street & Lefstein, 2008; Tett & Maclachlan, 2007) that has shown that it is more appropriate to talk about literacies as plural, rather than possessing one form that is rooted in a set of cognitive skills. This means that there are different literacy practices in different domains of social life, such as education, religion, workplaces, families, community activities. These change over time and different literacies are supported and shaped by the institutions and social relationships that people are part of and do not transfer easily across contexts. This socio-cultural approach grounds literacies in the lives of real people and starts from the local, everyday experience of literacy in particular communities of practice. My detailed studies of particular situations in ***Transforming*** and other publications (for example, Algren & Tett, 2010; Crowther, Maclachlan & Tett, 2010; Crowther & Tett, 2011; Tett & Maclachlan, 2007) have been revealing about these differences and in turn these have helped to identify the broader meanings, values and uses that literacy has for people in their day-to-day lives. Embedding these particular approaches into the Scottish curriculum for literacies learning has provided an important counter argument to the neoliberal one that emphasizes literacy as an individual deficit. Nevertheless, as I point out in ***Comparative Performance***, it is important to remember that economic discourses can prevail when narrow outcome measures of assessment are prioritized.

Another way of thinking about pedagogy is in terms of what is excluded or downgraded. A number of researchers have commented on the absence of the affective dimensions of learning (for example, Beard et al. 2007; Illeris, 2004) and how this has led to narrow pedagogies that focus on the most efficient ways of obtaining credentials. My research has sought to understand how particular pedagogies, and the curricula that arise from them, can enhance the educational experiences of those that have experienced disadvantage. In particular, it has focused on learning identities and the affective dimension of education. For example, in both ***Transitions*** and ***Narratives*** I have shown that emotional support from both peers and staff is important in enabling 'non-traditional' students to fit into the university as well as making effective transitions throughout their university learning journeys.

The absence of an affective dimension is also evident in many programmes of literacies education. ***Transforming***, however, demonstrates its importance because the impact of the policy discourse of individual deficit results in many students feeling shame about their lack

of literacies and this impedes their learning. My submitted publications show my contribution to exposing and addressing this notable absence in the literature and demonstrating why it is important to include the affective dimension in pedagogical approaches in both the fields of literacy and higher education.

Another area that is excluded from much research into the impact of performativity, and the resulting prioritisation of what is easily measurable, is how this affects pedagogy. Because my research is rooted in critical theory I have focused on the application of practical knowledge in order to understand how local actors interpret pedagogy. My publications *Transitions*, *Narratives* and *Transforming* all investigated how the outcomes that are measured have a role in constructing a narrow curriculum that is focused on approved credentials. For example, *Narratives* showed the role of the National Student Survey in pushing university staff towards focusing on the measured output of return time for essays, rather than how students feel about their learning. In addition, *Transforming* demonstrated the importance of a pedagogy that was based on a co-created curriculum and positive tutor-student relationships, in challenging learners' internalised deficit views of themselves.

Now that I have shown how my publications have contributed to a greater understanding of how policy impacts on pedagogy I turn to an analysis of the impact of different approaches to equity.

Equity

There are many ways of understanding equity in education but, as I pointed out in *Social Justice*, 'competing conceptualisations of injustice necessitate very different remedies' (Tett 2018b, 369). The OECD (2012b), for example, has argued that equity comprises two dimensions: *fairness and inclusion* that are closely intertwined. *Fairness* requires ensuring that personal and social circumstances such as gender, socio-economic status or ethnic origin should not prevent people from achieving their educational potential, whilst *inclusion* involves ensuring a basic standard of education for all. This OECD approach prioritises the achievement of equality of opportunity 'where the underlying assumption is that education is meritocratic, we live in a fair society that ensures that people will progress according to their ability [and] injustice can be remedied by making changes in how educational opportunities are distributed' (Tett 2018b, 361). This means that the focus is on outcomes, which in turn are conceived as the learning prescribed in a test. My publications show that this view is problematic because it takes for granted the reproduction of inequality and

cumulative disadvantage whilst simultaneously legitimising educational governance technologies based on performativity and comparison.

A further iteration of this conceptualization of equity for adult learning is that fairness is construed as providing opportunities for people to access education that they can take up or not according to their own wishes and desires. Here the assumption, as I discuss in *Lifelong Learning*, is that failure to take up these opportunities is the fault of the individual rather than caused by cumulative disadvantage. This is why I argue that Nancy Fraser's (2008) threefold concept of social justice - redistribution, recognition and participatory parity - is more useful in enabling the promotion of equity in education because it includes the redistribution of learning opportunities among the most marginalised groups, the promotion of their participation in all matters concerning their lives and wellbeing, and a recognition of their diversity and of the structural reasons behind their exclusion and marginalization.

Using these ideas in the publications on higher education (*Transitions* and *Narratives*) it has been possible to address the argument that equity is often 'treated as a "black box" ... with an almost exclusive focus on class differences in education attainment...[rather than] as a means to improve the quality of life for all' (Brown 2013, 691). The paper *Narratives* has shown that the quality of life associated with caring relationships is an equity issue. This is because care often goes disproportionately to students that are more articulate and assertive in asking for it and raises the issue of 'how staff can personalise students' learning journeys without unfairly responding to those with the cultural and social capital to enable them to know the rules of the game' (Tett et al. 2017b, 176). In order to achieve social justice this paper calls for 'an education that respects genuine difference among people' (ibid. 177) and provides for students of varying abilities and interests.

How equity is conceptualized is also crucial because, when the focus is only on entry to higher education, arguments are made that widening access through accepting alternative or lower qualifications from less advantaged groups has reduced inequalities. However, research shows that the privileged maintain their advantage after they have entered higher education. This is because students from advantaged backgrounds 'seek ever-increasing ways of securing their position and coming out on top' (Bathmaker et al. 2003, 741) through consciously cultivating the extra-curricular activities that are likely to have an impact on their opportunities post HE (Redmond 2006, 131). Moreover, viewing entry to, and participation in, higher education only through the 'equality of opportunity' lens assumes that we live in a fair society and, as I point out in *Social Justice*, also ignores the cultural aspects of equity. In

particular, the ways in which the attachments people feel to their families and communities and their values of collectivity are dismissed as irrelevant to HE.

Transitions contributes to understanding in detail the ways in which ‘non-traditional’ students are treated inequitably both through feeling unconnected to an institution that seems alien and also through being unaware of the tacit assumptions and practices of the disciplines that they are studying so they do not feel that they are entitled to fully participate. It also shows the importance of becoming embedded in the social structures of institutionalised practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and the difficulties that this can pose for ‘non-traditional’ students. *Transitions* demonstrates, however, that when students were part of supportive networks, were coping academically and had found effective ways of fully engaging in the knowledge practices of the university (Tett et al. 2017a, 404) then they were able to take these changes in their self-belief into their personal and professional lives.

The publications *Transitions* and *Narratives* have added to the understanding of the inequity of participation but in adult literacies education, especially through *Comparative performance* and *Social Justice*, I have been able to take this further. Through these latter publications, I have shown how underlying conceptualisations of equality, as well as how these are interpreted, drive what counts and what is counted. *Comparative performance* and *Social Justice* have demonstrated that when policies only focus on the economic and assume that the individual has the responsibility for improving their worth through gaining skills and qualifications then students are defined by what they cannot do and thus disrespected. Moreover, policy discourses that treat some people as if they should have no say in their own education lead to a narrow conception of education that does not focus on the whole human being but instead prioritises ‘techno-rationalist discourses of human capital and individual responsibility’ (Burke, 2015, 391). Thus, as I argue in *Social Justice*, the impact of broader social and economic inequalities on access to educational opportunities is obscured and the many ways in which large-scale systematic injustice is constructed out of individual differences are ignored.

Social Justice has also made a contribution to knowledge by interrogating the three aspects of Fraser’s (2008) social justice framework (redistribution, recognition and participatory parity) using empirical data from literacy programmes. This has enabled me to demonstrate the importance of a socially just education where learning environments are created that ‘enable participants to have the necessary material and human resources to achieve their goals, to have their cultural experiences respected and to have their views acted upon’ (Tett 2018b, 371). This chapter also shows how scrutinising the impact of participation in adult

education through the dominant equality of opportunity lens leads to the prioritization of greater employability outcomes. Instead the chapter argues for the importance of using the broader conceptualisation of social justice because this view means that wider outcomes can be recognised. ***Social Justice*** demonstrates that these outcomes include changes in self-confidence brought about by students having their cultural experiences treated with respect (recognition) as well as having a greater ability to participate in democratic decision-making in local community and family matters and have their views acted on (participatory parity).

Summary

In this section I have shown how my publications have made a contribution to knowledge through the analysis of the impact of policy on pedagogy and how both are framed by particular understandings of equity. I have demonstrated why it is important to deconstruct the dominant neoliberal discourse, and the resulting priority that is given to narrow economically focused outputs, in order to assess the outcomes of adult learning more appropriately. This involves valuing wider outcomes such as increases in self-confidence and greater ability to participate in democratic decision-making.

In the next section I turn to a consideration of changes in learner identities as a result of participation in education and explain why it is important.

Learning and identity

In the previous section my focus was on the more formal aspects of learning but, as John Field points out, we also learn from our lives particularly through 'reflection on all the institutions and practices in which we engage' (Field 2012, 176). This section therefore discusses a less examined aspect of the learning of adults, which is about changes in people's identity. I follow Norton (2000) in conceptualizing identity as: how a person understands his or her relationship to the world; how that relationship is constructed across time and space; and how the person understands the possibilities for their future. Identities do change over time but this process can be difficult because people tend to maintain their identities in order to make their lives coherent and stable so, as Illeris (2014) points out, 'transformations imply strong motivation...[to] justify the exertion involved' (p. 159). My focus here is on the relationship between learning and having an identity as someone who sees oneself, and is seen by significant others, as a competent learner. My position is that learning identities should not be conceptualised as differences that are inherent to the individual but rather should be seen as created and recreated in interaction between the individual and the social world that they inhabit (see Tett 2012, 75). This means that learning identities are situated within dynamic contexts that are more or less accessible depending upon people's prior knowledge, existing practices, and imagined trajectories (Warriner, 2010).

In the rest of this section I draw on the publications *Transitions*, *Narratives* and *Transforming* to discuss two aspects of learning and identity: experience and relationships; power and practices.

Identity, experience and relationships

Learning has a strong relationship to identity because, through the institutions of the family, education and work, the individual's outlook and self-image are socially shaped in interaction with others (Sfard & Prusak, 2005; Wenger, 1998). This means that identity comprises not only 'who you think you are' (as an individual and/or collective) but also 'who you act as being' (Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx 2011, 2) within your interpersonal and intergroup interactions. Identity is also shaped by the social recognition (or not) that these interactions receive from others. Learner identity is therefore constructed in discursive interactions throughout one's life and so it is amenable to change. Although learning identities are not fixed they do tend to act as self-fulfilling prophecies because they are

shaped by the complex interaction of a number of factors. These include past learning experiences and the mediating effect of family influences upon them as well as the norms and values of the social networks to which individuals belong (Crossan et al, 2003; Maclachlan & Tett, 2006). This means that identities feed into, and are fed by, learning experiences and so play a critical role in determining whether the process of learning will end with what counts as success or with what is regarded as failure.

I have used this socio-cultural lens in both *Transitions* and *Transforming* to show the importance of understanding dispositions to learning as part of a social process of identity formation. From this perspective learning is influenced by biography and culture, is embodied and relational and comes about through 'the integration of product and process' (Hodkinson 2005, 116). Learning is therefore not just about 'the acquisition of habits and skills', but also about 'developing shared values, assumptions and purposes with others in particular communities of practice' (Tett et al, 2017a, 391). Using this framework has enabled me to illustrate in *Transitions* how students learn to 'fit in' to the institution and in *Transforming* how learning identities are formed but can also be reformed given a co-created curriculum and positive learning environment.

Although these papers span the spectrum of adult learning, both make it clear that previous educational experiences are significant for the understanding of motivations, barriers to learning and the support needs of adult returners to learning. In *Transitions* the students previous experiences in Further Education Colleges (FE) led to their loss of a sense of belonging when in HE because of a 'combination of leaving a familiar environment, more limited support from staff and peers, the uncertainty about what was expected of them academically and the delay in providing immediate feedback on their work' (Tett et al. 2017a, 403). In *Transforming* earlier negative experiences of schooling meant that literacy learners 'had internalized the negative discourses about their [lack of] abilities because their teachers, their peers and, in some cases, their parents constructed their skills and experiences as deficient and inferior' (Tett, 2018a).

Wenger (1998, 153) argues 'we know who we are by what is familiar, understandable, usable, negotiable; we know who we are not by what is foreign, opaque, unwieldy, unproductive'. However, there is always space for individuals to play an 'active role in constructing meaning through their interactions with the discourses they encounter' (Tett 2018a, 4). My research has shown that, in both the literacy and HE contexts, changes have occurred and students have been able to see themselves, and be seen by others, in new ways. *Transitions* and *Transforming* also demonstrate that identities are multiple

constructs because collective discourses are developed through students being embedded in new social relationships and these relationships also shape their personal worlds. This means that 'the collective and the common enter individual activities...through learning' (Sfard & Prusak, 2005: 15).

The other commonality in these papers is the importance of relationships with staff and peers in enabling the reconstruction of positive learning identities. In *Transitions* when students reflected back on their overall experience it was the set of social relations with staff and peers that enabled them to reconceptualise their capabilities so that they moved from 'thinking "I'll never manage a degree" to thinking "I did manage that degree"' (Tett et al. 2017a, 401). This growth in self-confidence enabled students to change 'their position from one of dependence to one of greater independence', gain confidence in their own knowledge and learn to become more critical so that they saw 'themselves and the world in new ways that had a strong impact on [all] aspects of their lives' (ibid. 404). Similarly, in *Transforming* students learned and changed together because their previously internalized sense of personal failure could be challenged through the giving and receiving of care within positive relationships with their tutors and their peers (Tett 2018a, 13).

Both these papers also show that opportunities for learning are not only situated in specific contexts, but are also connected to the resources that students bring to these different communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). When students cognitive, emotional and social resources (Illeris, 2004) were recognised this led to the development of new, valued practices and this process could lead to transformative changes in their learning identities.

Learning, power and practices

Viewing learning and identity as developing through social relationships and within particular 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998) is also helpful in understanding the relationship between learning, power and practices. As Foucault has argued, discourses and practices 'reach into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes, and everyday lives' (Foucault 1980, 39). In this part of my commentary I draw on *Transforming, Narratives* and *Transitions* to illustrate how power operates through the ways in which people 'feel comfortable or constrained when speaking, acting, or entering into others' spaces ... [as well as how far cultural] symbols and ... meanings' (Tett 2018a, 5) are shared and understood.

In *Transforming* I showed how on-the-ground relationships of power provided greater or lesser access to 'activities, genres and, through those genres, authoritative voices, or no

voice at all' (Holland et al., 1998, p. 127). For the literacy students their negative school experiences, where they blamed themselves for their 'failure to learn', led to an internalized discourse of deficit that made them uncomfortable in educational spaces and silenced their voices. **Transforming** demonstrated how power operates through discourse to regulate expectations and actions and this means that if students have problems in communicating their knowledge and understanding then they will not be able to fully engage in the practices that are accepted as 'normal' in a literate world (Tett 2018, 5). Since discourses are modelled on social practices and will include or exclude different things (van Leeuwen, 2016) what students are able to *do* will be valued in different ways in different contexts. People are not passive receptacles or carriers of discourses, however, but rather are actively and critically interpreting and enacting them (Tett 2018a, 4). Changing involves people making use of a different discursive framework through which to interrogate their experiences and their doings, and such changes happen when their knowledge and experiences are recognized and they are part of supportive groups. This in turn means that they can begin to imagine the future differently and reposition themselves in the worlds of which they are part.

Foucault (1990) has argued that it is in communicative interaction that learning takes place and identities are shaped through the ways in which the world and the self are made known and knowable. I have shown in **Transforming** that the mechanism through which change happens is when students are able to challenge the discourse of deference about education and move towards seeing themselves as having an entitlement to participate in productive learning (Tett 2018a, 15). A key part of this discursive shift is the result of students gaining confidence in their abilities through being part of communities with shared meanings about what is valued and valuable in their community of practice. For example, in **Transforming** the students emphasized how their increasing literacy skills enabled them to recognise what they were good at rather than dwelling on what they could not do and so they could effect change in other areas of their lives such as taking 'a few risks because if you only stick to what you know you're never going to achieve anything' (Tett 2018a, 12). Nearly all of the students reported changes in their self-awareness as well as an increased ability to imagine the future differently because they were able to reconceptualise their previous negative experiences as a result of people saying to them 'you can be capable' (Tett 2018a, 10).

This shift in the assessment of what students consider themselves to be capable of doing is also evident in **Narratives**. For example, one student reported that she was well supported by the staff from her programme because she thought 'they respected us as mature students and working people, which was really good and there was equality there, rather

than being a student-teacher thing. There was recognition as well of our knowledge as well as our practice experience and ability' (Tett et al. 2017b, 172). In this case, there was an implicit reference to a shared experience of social class because the student felt that her lecturer 'had the same sort of background as me so he was very understanding of my problems' (ibid.). This meant both that the normal power hierarchy between staff and student was somewhat levelled and also that the discursive world of the university became more familiar because of these shared commonalities.

In *Transitions* the students' perceptions of the extent of their reciprocal relationship and connectedness with particular academics were crucial in enabling them to change their learning practices. One example is the student that spoke of her low levels of confidence that had been changed by the positive appraisal of her course leader saying 'yes, you can manage that assignment' (Tett et al. 2017a, 401). This kind of support meant that students gained the confidence to share their ideas and led to a shift in power because they had an expectation that they would be able to apply the knowledge that they had to different situations. They also gained the confidence to change their practices of deference towards expert knowledge so that they were able to identify and critique the premises and assumptions that they had previously taken for granted. This in turn meant that they were in powerful positions to use their changed learning practices in a variety of professional and personal situations including 'thinking about the bigger picture' and learning that if 'things don't work out, you have to try again' (ibid. 403).

All three papers document the strong relationship between learning, power and identity and changing practices within relationships of care. Students were able to become more critical, to speak out, take risks and think differently because of their development of expertise in the practices that were valued in their particular contexts. In both the literacy and higher education contexts individuals were able to generate transformative changes because they adopted identities that were 'more inclusive, differentiating, permeable (open to other viewpoints), critically reflective of assumptions, emotionally capable of change, and integrative of experience' (Mezirow & Associates 2000, 19).

Through these three papers I have shown how both positional identities (that are about the on-the-ground relationships of power and status) and figured identities (that are related to culture and arise out of socially shared meanings) (Holland et al. 1998) can be reformed through collective meanings that can create alternative, more positive, 'as if' worlds. These changes arise out the reconceptualization of previously internalised negative experience through productive relationships with staff and peers. Identities are situated and so what

counts as knowledge, how that knowledge should be displayed, and how commonly accepted practices can be challenged and transformed 'are formed dialectically' (Holland et al. 1998, 49) and so can be changed. This conceptualisation also challenges the dominant discourse of education in which students are positioned as intelligent or ignorant, responsible or apathetic and are required 'to be skilled, mobile, self-reliant, economic agents and notions of their "potential" and "fulfilment" are centred on their economic value' (Gillies and Mifsud 2016, 829).

By documenting the importance of the social, emotional and cognitive dimensions of learning through these three publications I have made a contribution to disrupting the dominant economic discourse and showing why all three dimensions should be included when assessing the efficacy of adult learning. I have also shown that changing learning identities involves people in making use of a different discursive framework through which to interrogate their experiences and their doings, and such changes happen when their knowledge and experiences are recognized and they are part of supportive groups within relationships of care.

Contribution to knowledge creation

In this concluding section I first summarise the concepts and themes that underpin all of my six publications and then discuss my contribution to knowledge.

The first underpinning concept is that ideas structure the social spaces we inhabit through dominant discourses. These discourses shape the understanding of what is seen to constitute 'truth' and so can marginalise and oppress other realities. My conception of the power of discourses comprises not only how they are taken up and embedded, but also how they can be resisted and challenged.

The other underpinning concept is the framing of learning and pedagogy through the lens of socio-cultural theory. This theory emphasises that meaning is socially negotiated, shaped by the social structures of the context in which learning takes place and that learning is part of a social process of identity formation. From this perspective, my focus has been on how different approaches to learning and pedagogy impact on particular learning communities and how people's predispositions and expectations affect their educational experiences.

There are two main themes running through all of my six publications. The first is that conceptualisations of the relationship between policy, pedagogy and equity have a strong impact on learning. This is because the dominant neoliberal discourse shapes the expected outcomes of education through the focus on the economic and this narrows the pedagogic options available to students. This discourse also leads to narrow conceptions of equity that focus on improving individual skills deficits so that people become more employable. However, although this economic focus favours narrow skills- and qualifications- based outcomes, practitioners have been able to resist these limiting outcomes by prioritising participants' own goals and including the affective dimension of learning. This results in a broad conceptualisation of social justice that prioritises change that leads to redistribution, recognition and democratic decision-making.

The second theme focused on changes in learning identities, which were conceptualised not as differences that are inherent to the individual, but rather as being created in interaction between the individual and their social worlds. This means that, although relationships of power shape what are assumed to be valuable practices, when knowledge and experiences are recognized and students are part of supportive groups within relationships of care then these assumptions can be questioned and changed.

In the rest of this section I draw on the three criteria used in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) to assess the quality of work in UK higher education institutions (see <https://www.ref.ac.uk/about/>) of **originality** (defined as the innovative character of the research outputs in developing concepts, techniques or outcomes), **significance** (defined as the development of the intellectual agenda of the field that may be theoretical, methodological and/or substantive) and **rigour** (defined as the intellectual precision, robustness and appropriateness of the concepts, analyses, theories and methodologies deployed) to show how my six publications and this commentary together provide a coherent and significant contribution to knowledge creation in the field of adult learning.

Originality

My contribution to originality is to demonstrate the impact of the power of discourses at the macro level on policies, at the meso level on pedagogies, at the micro level on individuals. As a result different discursive practices have major ideological effects on the reproduction or disruption of unequal power relations. This contribution is original because researchers tend to focus on one of these levels and very few have investigated the relationship between all three. This means that my research contributes to the *breadth* of understanding the learning of adults. My research also contributes to the *depth* of understanding because I have drawn on detailed studies of policy and practice, in the two fields of literacies and HE, to show how discourses are interpreted, enacted and resisted through the adoption of particular practices. Again few researchers have shown in detail how discourses are translated into policy and in turn impact on pedagogy and the learning of individual adults.

Significance

I have developed the intellectual agenda of the field of adult learning, especially in the HE context, through my emphasis on the importance of the role of the affective dimension in learning, whereas previously most emphasis had been solely on the cognitive dimension. *Transitions* and *Narratives* have been published too recently to have significance but previous publications from this project ('From FE to HE', led by Professor Cree, University of Edinburgh) have been widely cited. For example, Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell and McCune, (2008) had been cited 350 times (according to Google Scholar, 30th December 2018) by scholars from Africa, Australia, China, Europe, Japan, New Zealand, North America, South America and the UK.

The other demonstration of significance is in how my research on the relationship between policy, pedagogy and equity has influenced policy and practice in the field of adult literacy.

Again most of the publications in this thesis have been published too recently to have anything other than a potential significance but the research on which they are based has been referenced in policy documents (for example, Education Scotland, 2016; Scottish Government, 2011) aimed at advising staff about their pedagogical approaches. The influence of my publications has led to these documents arguing that the structural conditions in which people live (especially poverty), rather than their individual deficits, cause lower literacies capabilities and a resulting emphasis on pedagogies that prioritise students' strengths and the value of their experience.

Rigour

Overall, I have made every effort to conduct my research with integrity in accordance with my critical theory paradigm and, in so doing, sought to challenge injustice and asymmetrical power relations. In this commentary I have identified the originality and significance of my research and shown how it fits into the broader context of adult learning and education. I have carefully reviewed the literature and shown how my work has both drawn on this evidence, and is clearly situated within it, in the development of my theoretical concepts and themes about the learning of adults. I have ensured that my research is clear, coherent and consistent through subjecting it to internal and external peer reviews and improving it in the light of these reviews. For all these reasons I consider that my research has been conducted robustly and with precision.

Conclusion

In summary I consider that I have met the criteria set by the university of Huddersfield for the award of a 'PhD by publication'. I have presented a substantial commentary that has identified the context of the learning of adults, situated my work in the relevant literature through reviewing and critiquing relevant research in the fields of literacy and HE, demonstrated my acquisition and utilisation of research skills of a high order through a clear analysis of my ontological, epistemological, methodological and ethical position and shown the coherence and significance of my work in terms of knowledge creation.

Further research

I have two main areas of research that I want to develop further. I am currently researching (with a colleague from the University of Edinburgh) the impact of family learning from the perspectives of the participants, the family learning practitioners and the head teachers of the schools in which the learning programmes took place. Writing this commentary has prompted me to focus the next academic article on the competing discourses from these three different perspectives about the purposes and outcomes of these programmes. After that I plan to develop a book about the relationship between policy, pedagogy and equity in the learning of adults. This book will draw on the research in adult literacies that I have already discussed in this commentary, but I will also utilise two additional research contexts - family learning and health issues in communities - that will provide some different insights.

My interest in the dialogue between research, policy and practice has led to some of the insights from the family learning research being discussed with the Scottish Government and family-learning practitioners and this may lead to some changes in policy and practice. In addition, I intend the book to be accessible to a broad audience beyond the academic in the hope that it provides 'really useful knowledge' (Johnson, 1988: 21–22) to those that read it.

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Appendices

A. Literacies Publications

Books, chapters and reports

- Crowther, J. and Tett, L. (2001) 'Democracy as a way of life. Literacy for Citizenship' in J. Crowther, M. Hamilton and L. Tett (Eds.) *Powerful Literacies* Leicester: NIACE pp. 108-118
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- Tett, L. Maclachlan, K. Hall, S., Edwards, V. Thorpe, G. and Garside, L. (2006) *Evaluation of the Scottish Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*, Glasgow: Scottish Executive, 86pp
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- Maclachlan, K. and Tett, L. (2006) Learning to change or changing the learning: adult literacy and numeracy in Scotland, *Journal of adult and continuing education*, 12 (2), 195-206
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- Tett, L., Anderson K., McNeill F., Overy K. and Sparks R. (2012) Literacy and the arts in prisons: a Scottish case study, *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 44 (2) pp. 171-185
- Tett, L (2014) Comparative performance measures, globalising strategies and literacy policy in Scotland, *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 12 (1) 127-142
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2013.858996>
- Tett, L (2014) Lifelong learning policies, paradoxes and possibilities, *Adult Learner: Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education*, 15-28
- Tett, L (2016) Learning, literacy and identity: 'I don't think I'm a failure any more' *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 37 (3), 427-444
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2014.939265>
- Tett, L. (2018) Transforming learning identities in literacy programmes, *Journal of Transformative Education* pp. 1-19 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1541344617750277> (online)
- Allatt, G. and Tett, L. (2018) 'Adult literacy practitioners and employability skills: resisting neo-liberalism?' *Journal of Education Policy*, pp.1-18
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B. Higher Education Publications

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- *Christie, H. Cree, V., Hounsell, J. McCune, V. and Tett, L. (2006) 'From College to University: looking backwards, looking forwards' *Research in Post-compulsory Education*, 11(3), 351-365
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- *Cree, V., Hounsell, J. Christie, H. McCune, V. and Tett, L., (2009) From Further Education to Higher Education: Social Work Students' Experiences of Transition to an Ancient, Research-led University, *Social Work Education*, 28 (8), 887-901
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- *Tett, L., Hounsell, J., Cree, V., Christie, H. and McCune, V. (2012) Learning from feedback? Mature students' experiences of assessment in higher education, *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 17 (2), 247-260
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- *Christie, H., Cree, V. and Tett, L. (2017) 'University opened up so many doors for me': the personal and professional development of graduates from non-traditional backgrounds, *Studies in Higher Education*, pp. 1-11
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*Tett, L., Cree, V., Mullins, E. and Christie, H. (2017) 'Narratives of care amongst undergraduate students' *Pastoral Care in Education*, 35, (3), 166–178
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2017.1363813>

*Denotes publications from the 'FE to HE' project

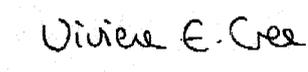
C. The contribution of Lyn Tett to joint publications

I am the Principal Investigator on the 'FE to HE Project' and Professor Tett has been the co-investigator since its initiation in 2004. During this time she has been involved in all aspects of the project including data collection and analysis, literature reviews and writing reports and academic papers. The outputs from the project comprise eleven academic papers altogether, two of which Professor Tett is including in her thesis, namely:

Tett, L., Cree, V., and Christie, H. (2017) From further to higher education: transition as an on-going process, *Higher Education* 73, (3) 389-406 [**Transitions**]

Tett, L., Cree, V., Mullins, E. and Christie, H. (2017) 'Narratives of care amongst undergraduate students' *Pastoral Care in Education*, 35, (3), 166–178 [**Narratives**]

I confirm that she was the corresponding author and main contributor to both these papers, taking responsibility for identifying the literature, the themes that would be addressed, exploring conceptual issues and organising the substantive questions on which the papers focused. This contribution amounted to approximately 60% for each of the above papers .



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The six publications

- Tett, L. (2014a) Lifelong learning policies, paradoxes and possibilities, *Adult Learner: Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education*, 15-28 [**Lifelong learning**]
- Tett, L. (2014b) Comparative performance measures, globalising strategies and literacy policy in Scotland, *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 127–142 [**Comparative performance**]
- Tett, L., Cree, V., and Christie, H. (2017a) From further to higher education: transition as an on-going process, *Higher Education* 73, (3) 389-406 [**Transitions**]
- Tett, L., Cree, V., Mullins, E. and Christie, H. (2017b) 'Narratives of care amongst undergraduate students' *Pastoral Care in Education*, 35, (3), 166–178 [**Narratives**]
- Tett, L. (2018a) Transforming learning identities in literacy programmes, *Journal of Transformative Education* pp. 1-19 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1541344617750277> (online) [**Transforming**]
- Tett, L. (2018b) 'Participation in adult literacy programmes and social injustices' in Milana, M. Webb, S. Holford, J. Waller, R. and Jarvis, P. (Eds.) *International Handbook on adult and lifelong education and learning*, Palgrave MacMillan [**Social Justice**]

Lifelong learning

Tett, L. (2014a). Lifelong learning policies, paradoxes and possibilities, *Adult Learner: Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education*, 15-28

Comparative performance

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Transitions

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