CHANGES IN POST-COMPULSORY EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN ENGLAND: EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHIC RESPONSES TO ENCOUNTERS WITH LEARNING SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT

In the context of official interest in 'personalised learning' and of growing academic interest in relationships between emotion and learning, this paper investigates the experience of individual learners who have been allocated learning support in organisations within the post-compulsory education sector in England. This support is additional to that provided by the teacher or trainer, in formal educational settings and in work-based contexts. Learning support workers have a range of different titles and hugely varied terms, pay and conditions of work (Robson et al, 2006). Generally, their role centres on the provision of individual support, guidance and tuition for a diverse group of learners, on part-time or full-time courses, with academic or vocational interests, whose ages may range from 14 to over 50.

Following Reay (2005) and Lucey (2004) connections are assumed between individual psycho-emotional worlds and social, political and institutional life. Thus, the context for learning will be understood in both its social and psychic dimensions. The particular focus in this paper is on the interviewees' constructions of their emotional and psychic responses to their encounters with learning support. Data from 27 semi-structured interviews with learners from a range of education and training organisations were analysed thematically. Most learners constructed emotional and psychic responses to learning support which focussed on feelings of relief, gratitude and satisfaction. Concepts drawn from Kleinian psychoanalysis are appropriated here for use as metaphors in the analysis. There is discussion of respondents' tendencies towards 'idealising' their learning support worker (LSW) in their defensive efforts to cope with a degree of 'social anxiety' (Hoggett, 2006). Interview responses tended to position the learners as socially and psychologically 'needy', and suggested that (for them) a range of difficulties and deficits may exist in conventional learning contexts where less individual support may be available. There is some discussion of the implications of these findings for learners, tutors and trainers, LSWs and post-compulsory educational organisations, as well as of the role emotion might play in post-compulsory learning contexts.

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Introduction

This paper focuses on the provision and experience of learning support within the further education and training system in England. It is based on findings from a research project funded by the (then) Learning and Skills Development Agency, from 2005 to 2006. This project investigated the role of 'para-teachers' or learning support workers (LSW) employed by further education (FE) and sixth form colleges (SFC), as well as by work-based learning (WBL) and adult and community learning (ACL) providers. The staff referred to here as LSWs have, in practice, a range of titles and there is variation also in their tasks (between types of provider, between providers of the same type and within individual providers). There is no 'standard' role, title or job description for LSWs. Principally, however, they directly support individual learners or groups of learners in the classroom or elsewhere (Robson et al, 2006). In some areas of post-compulsory education and training, the appointment of these staff is relatively new. In other areas (such as in ACL provision for learners with physical disabilities, for example) they have been employed for some time. Many providers are now actively seeking to increase the numbers of LSWs that they employ.

In post-compulsory education, increased marketisation and competition for students has brought (amongst other things) a focus on ways of enhancing the learning experience and improving student retention. In many FE colleges, for example, this has led to significant improvements in support services, physical accommodation for learners and operational performance (Ofsted, 2005). In some, it has also led to the employment of learning support workers. Within this context, where funding imperatives may directly affect recruitment and retention practices, the relationships and personal interactions between students and their tutors, their courses and institutions are of increasing interest to staff, managers and policy-makers.

The wider investigation on which this account is based involved a national survey and 87 qualitative interviews with staff and students in nine diverse providers in the English further education and training system (see Robson et al, 2006). The starting point for the current article was our surprise at the intensity of learners' responses in interviews about the support they received from LSWs within their institutions. This support was nearly always viewed very favourably and reported in enthusiastic terms. Learners expressed feelings of deep relief, gratitude and satisfaction. Why should they feel so grateful? How were these respondents positioning themselves and others in their talk in relation to these experiences? What kinds of perceptions and processes were involved and what can we learn from them about the nature and impact of learners' psychic and emotional experiences?

The overwhelming perception amongst providers who took part in the study was that LSWs were 'effective' or 'very effective' in a range of ways. Most commonly cited benefits were improvements to student retention and achievement (though not many were able to ascribe this directly to their employment of LSWs). The study also found that although some learners were thought to be overly-dependent on their support

worker (some providers actively sought to prevent this) and some tutors expressed concerns about the crossing of work and role boundaries, in general learners themselves were very positive about their relationships with LSWs and the level of support provided by them. It is to these relationships that we now turn to examine learner perceptions in more detail.

Acknowledging emotion

Ahmed (2004) observes that emotions have been a 'sticking point' for philosophers, cultural theorists, psychologists and sociologists, as well as for scholars from a range of other disciplines. She argues that what is relegated to the margins is often at the centre of thought itself. Reay (2005), in focusing on emotional and psychic responses to social class, observes that generally such concerns have been consigned to the realm of individual psychology and pushed out of mainstream sociological research. Using evidence drawn from a variety of educational case studies, she argues that attention to the workings of the psyche and a greater 'understanding of how social class is actually lived' is a legitimate concern for sociology (p.913).

In her analysis of welfare relationships and institutions, Froggett (2002) explores ways in which the 'non-rational' can be thought about. Sociology is not adequate, she argues, to develop detailed accounts of the relationship between the individual and the group, to understand the complexities of their lived experience, as 'they move between the intimate, local and particular and the wider culture and institutions' (p.32). Similarly, Hoggett (2000) identifies a current 'absence of attention to emotion, sentiments, psychosomatic reactions, gut feelings, flows of affect, between people, within and between groups' (p.11). Without emotional contact, there can be no development, he argues, for the patient or student, for the nurse or teacher, or for the institutions to which they belong. For Hoggett, such an approach involves 'bringing the subject back in to social science' (p.12) and coming to terms with both its negative and positive aspects, in the interests of social and political transformation.

The growing acknowledgement of the importance of the psychic or affective dimension in educational encounters is best typified by the work of Walkerdine et al (2001) on girls' educational success, Lucey & Reay (2002 a) on school choice and Reay et al (2001) on higher education choice. Beard et al (2007) argue that an understanding of the affective dimension of the university learning experience is overdue and may be particularly relevant and helpful to students themselves. In contrast, Ecclestone (2004) argues that the contemporary focus on emotions and a preoccupation with vulnerability in educational contexts encourages a 'diminished' view of the individual, one in which they are perceived as unable to cope without support, lacking belief in their own agency and potentially denied the chance to locate themselves in a broader social and political context. She acknowledges, however, that empirical investigations into what she terms the 'therapeutic ethos' in education would assist with understanding its origins and effects.

Little appears to have been written about the feelings and emotional experiences of learners in the FE system and the most relevant literature is that which explores the young people's transitions to the work-place and associated attempts to orientate to specific vocational cultures (see Bates, 1994; Colley et al, 2003). These studies challenge the view that vocational learning consists primarily of the acquisition of

technical skills and knowledge and effectively highlight, for example, the emotional adjustments required by those seeking to become nursery nurses. Studies of young people's decision-making in 14-19 education and training also highlight the importance of feelings of disaffection or disengagement (e.g. Ball et al, 2000; Archer et al 2005) and the perceptions and feelings of young learners are reported, for example, in the review of vocational provision by Huddleston (2004) which argues that insufficient attention is given to the learner's voice in the design of such programmes.

Bloomer (2001) notes the importance of understanding how learning connects with context and life experiences. In investigating learning support across all parts of the FE system and across a range of curriculum areas, the research project from which this paper is drawn sought (amongst other things) to investigate the way this group of learners (whose real needs still tend to be neglected in much policy-making) constructed their experiences. The study established that those who attract learning support are some of the most vulnerable, having been identified by staff (or by themselves) as being 'at risk' (e.g. of drop-out), as having basic skills problems, social problems, or study difficulties of various kinds. The particular focus in this paper is on the interviewees' constructions of their emotional and psychic responses to their encounters with learning support.

As in work by a number of other authors (including Reay and Lucey), in this article connections are assumed between individual psycho-emotional worlds and social, institutional and political life. Respondents are treated as psychosocial subjects (Lucey, 2004) with both a social and a psychic past, constrained by both social and psychic structures and motivated both consciously and unconsciously. Thus, 'context' is understood in both its social and psychic dimensions, and learning as an interactive and passionate activity. The analysis is framed by an understanding of the data as discourse, as constructions or 'versions of reality' (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) rather than as straightforward accounts of 'the way things are'. An understanding of respondents' positionings of themselves and others is sought through the appropriation of concepts drawn from Kleinian psychoanalysis, which are used in the analysis as metaphors. Thus, the approach builds on that taken in relation to children's experiences of school choice by Reay & Lucey (2003) in an attempt to explore meanings attached by our respondents in the FE system to their emotional experiences of learning support.

Learners in PCET

The respondents in this study were drawn from all parts of post-compulsory education and training except higher education. Terminology in England can shift and be confusing; and the complex and large sector with which we are concerned here, located between the secondary schools and universities, has been officially referred to as 'the learning and skills sector' and 'the further education system' (DIUS, 2007) . It provides, for young people and adults, courses of general and vocational education and training, schemes of training in occupational skills, and programmes to improve the basic skills of those whose literacy and numeracy is weak. These learners range in age from 16 to 60+, and may be attending, on a full- or a part-time basis, short training courses or courses lasting two or three years.

There are three main types of providers of further education and training. They are, firstly, the colleges of further education (FE) and sixth form colleges (SFC). Secondly, work-related training is supplied by private training providers. These are businesses which vary greatly in size; they supply work-based learning (WBL) in occupational and basic skills, either on employers' premises or in off-the-job training centres. A third kind of provision is adult education, itself a broad category, which has traditionally included classes in recreation and liberal studies. Adult Community Learning (ACL), a recent introduction to the terminology, is a narrower concept than adult education. ACL takes place in a very wide range of settings, is often related to social inclusion or regeneration policies, and often involves community and voluntary organizations in programmes of outreach to disadvantaged groups in the community. These often focus on basic skills and, where appropriate, English as a second language usually with a view to developing adults' life and 'employability' skills.

The vast majority of learners in this sector are in colleges of further education and sixth form colleges. Many FE colleges provide adult education and ACL, as well as skills training, so that making clear distinctions between provider types is difficult. Although three times as many students attend FE colleges as universities, the 'royal route' from school to higher education dominates debate about 14-30 education and training (Brown et al, 2004). Stanton (2004) suggests that social segregation exists at post-16 such that the less well-educated the parents, the more likely their children are to be in FE colleges. School attainment levels amongst entrants to FE are lower than in school sixth forms, for example, and FE and sixth form colleges provide for 57% of black 16 year olds whilst schools provide for only 22%. Further, there are systematic differences in funding which, in general, result in the providers dealing with lower attaining and more disadvantaged learners receiving fewer resources (Stanton & Fletcher, 2006).

Learners in WBL provision are not on 'the royal route' either. They are likely to have left school with few (if any) qualifications and to be taking courses covering preparatory training for employment in basic and life skills. Young people opting for the work-based route, by undertaking an apprenticeship, for example, perhaps after a pre-apprenticeship programme, may cite negative experiences at school as an important motivation (Legard, Woodfield & White, 2001; Unwin & Wellington, 2001). There may be a perception, too, that the world of work is 'adult' (Helmlsey-Brown, 1999) and that employment, in contrast to 'staying on' in education, is the more legitimate route to adulthood itself (McDowell, 2003). Numbers of working class pupils in a study by Archer et al (2005) reported a 'lack of fit' between themselves and the predominantly middle-class ethos, language and staff in educational institutions. Adults in WBL can be undertaking training related to their current employment, or be unemployed and engaged in a range of government schemes to help them return to employment. Such schemes currently target those social groups with low rates of participation in post-compulsory education and training, for example, lone parents, those with learning difficulties and some ethnic minority groups.

The disjointed nature of young people's career transitions has been highlighted in work by Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000), Furlong & Cartmel (1997) and Hodkinson et al (1996), amongst others. Young people on 'the royal route' from school to university may 'diverge' also at times, of course, (for example, to take a gap year or a

job to support their studies). However, patterns of HE participation according to social class have remained fairly stable (Archer et al, 2003) and there is little doubt that most learners in the non-university post-school sector are positioned differently, and less advantageously, in the general 'economy of student worth' (Ball et al, 1998).

The following section discusses data drawn from semi-structured interviews with learners in each of these contexts of the further education system. In all, 27 learners were interviewed for the study, nine from each of WBL, ACL and FE/SFC. Respondents' ages ranged from 16 to 70; there were 18 female and ten male interviewees. Learners were asked about their constructions of their emotional experiences of learning and learning support, as they made their way into (in some cases back to) different parts of the further education system.

Anxiety in educational settings: 'and it were like a nightmare really'

In psychoanalytic theory, and particularly in the work of Melanie Klein, anxiety is central, inevitable and a feature of life from infancy. This conception contrasts with understandings of anxiety that feature in cognitive psychological accounts, where the premise is that anxiety relates to a conscious process or state, is susceptible to rational intervention and can be quantified and measured (Lucey & Reay, 2002b). In the psychoanalytic account, anxiety is unconscious, and an integral, necessary and 'normal' force in the construction of the 'self'. Further, the experience of unconscious anxiety continues throughout life and may be provoked when we encounter wider social factors (such as institutional rules) that have the capacity to destabilise or threaten our sense of self, or our needs (Lucey, 2004)

On an individual level, Klein believed that the unconscious and primitive anxiety experienced in infancy is dealt with by the infant so that the danger within becomes a danger without. Lucey (2004) explains how processes of 'splitting', 'projection' and 'idealisation' are defensive mechanisms used to separate positive from negative aspects of the self. For example, in the psychic process of 'splitting', the baby, who has no sense of boundaries between self and other, is able to bring order and organisation to its chaotic environment by separating good and bad experiences and feelings. 'Projection' is used to expel positive and negative feelings out of ourselves and on to another person or object. These external objects or people come to stand for those parts of our inner self. Destructive feelings such as hate, envy and anger which we cannot acknowledge as our own are then thought to be inside someone else. The 'bad' objects are then 'demonised'. Hoggett (2006) notes that such mechanisms can work at a collective level too, so that 'the mad, the bad, the sad, the old, the sick, the vulnerable, the failures and so on, receive not just our compassion but also our fear, contempt and hatred' (p.183). 'Idealisation' is another way of protecting ourselves from the full knowledge of our own destructive aggression. In the psychoanalytic account, we project the good aspects of the self onto another so that goodness is preserved, kept away from danger, and psychically separated; the good object may then become 'idealised'.

According to Hoggett (2006) the notion of 'social anxiety' is under theorised but it represents an attempt to apply the ideas of psychoanalysis to the fields of social policy and social analysis. Hoggett cites work by Jaques who believed anxiety was inherent to group life and who highlighted the role that the group (and, by implication, the

organisation) played in 'providing a receptacle for anxieties that individuals were unable to contain within themselves' (p.181). Further, the nature of our fears will be culturally and historically relative. In Hoggett's account, 'social anxiety' refers to both our lasting and our more ephemeral fears which are either culturally embedded or politically mediated. In educational contexts, social anxiety may be occasioned by, for example, transition from one institution to another, by academic failure or fear of failure, by feelings of 'not belonging', or by a lack of recognition of one's needs, aspirations or background. Hoggett (2000) notes that differences in and of themselves can arouse anxiety.

The anxieties reported in our study appear to operate in both conscious and unconscious ways. Respondents reported previous experiences in education of social, personal and psychological difficulties, such as shyness (for example, about speaking out in class), panic in examinations, inability to concentrate and feelings of isolation and vulnerability. In addition, some respondents constructed compelling narratives which appeared to link their experiences of anxiety and stress with their experiences of physical impairment and loss, a disrupted family life and schooling, undiagnosed learning difficulties, or bullying at school.

For Penny (ACL), there was the shock of losing her sight:

'I was 64 when I went blind. Until then I was busy. And it was an awful shock and I thought "what are you going to do?" and your family don't owe you anything and I've got four daughters but it's not up to them to look after me, it's up to me to find something to do.'

Michelle (ACL) had also experienced a physical loss:

'Originally I was trained to be a chef, in a kitchen, I was a professional chef, and that was when I could hear. Then I caught meningitis which destroyed what was left of the hearing I had. Which meant that the people I was working for didn't like disabled people, so I was discriminated [against]. And I couldn't cope working in that kitchen any more, because, if you can imagine, all the orders coming through and people shouting and I can't hear.'

Carol (WBL) was brought up in care, 'moving everywhere', and her schooling was badly disrupted, as a consequence:

'(…) and it were like a nightmare really. And because I didn't get good grades because all my coursework couldn't get from Birmingham to Bolton so I weren't very happy'.

Transitions can be critical. Carol's experience is not unique but, like Penny's blindness, it has powerful emotional consequences; her 'nightmare' that she would not get the grades she deserved for reasons beyond her control echoes Hannah's words (in Reay, 2005) when she says she is 'scared' of the forthcoming tests, 'frightened' that she will not do well enough and that as a result, she will 'be a nothing' (p.916).

In her interview, Clarissa (WBL) reported a different kind of anxiety, related to difficulties with social interaction:

'(…) I was really, when I first came here I wouldn't even have been able to come in this room and speak to you. I was dead shy and I couldn't speak to anyone (…)'.

By their own accounts, these learners had shown courage and determination in taking the decision to remain in (or return to) education or training and their stories illustrate the extent to which an understanding of learning needs to take account of both social and psychic contexts. The impact that low socio-economic status has on educational participation and achievement is well documented but as Bloomer (2001) noted with regard to his sample, and as we also observed, 'the detailed nature of individual cases often defied prediction' (p.433). The data also suggest that these learners are not as free to choose as they (and others) might suppose; 'choice' may be seriously constrained or not exist at all, in any real sense.

A growing body of work on young people's decision-making, in particular, acknowledges the impact of factors such as social background, gender, ethnicity and geographical location, as well as levels of educational attainment. Other research focuses on the role that attitudes and perceptions (including self-perceptions) play in learners' decision-making (see Wright, 2005). Data collected in our study suggest that an understanding of decision-making processes (as well as an understanding of learning itself and learning outcomes) may need also to take account of individual experiences of anxiety, of emotional and psychic responses to encounters in education, the family, the workplace and other social contexts.

In their interviews, as well as giving vivid descriptions of their anxieties and the contexts for these, respondents gave accounts of their recovery. The stories of past pain or previous difficulties were often used to set the scene for reports of a 'rescue', usually in the context of a new institution and (almost invariably) with the help of the learning support worker (or her equivalent). We argue that their talk illustrates some of the defence mechanisms that are identified in psychoanalysis as strategies for coping with anxiety, and below, we focus specifically on processes of 'idealisation'.

Idealising learning support: 'It is a very, very good feeling'.

As noted, in Klein's work on child analysis, idealisation as a concept is closely bound up with the concept of splitting (Klein, 1957). In psychic terms, the infant brings order to the environment by separating 'good' and 'bad' experiences and feelings which are then projected onto other people or objects. Just as bad objects may then be 'demonised', so good ones may be 'idealised'; indeed Klein's view is that this process is vital for normal development.

As in an earlier study (Robson & Bailey, 2008) a key feature of the LSW role, as it was constructed by both teachers and LSWs, was found to be its focus on individual learners (in contrast, it was claimed, with the teacher's focus on groups and classes). To the extent that it may recall an infant's early dependence on a maternal figure, this exclusive, one-to-one relationship in the educational context appears to promote and facilitate a degree of idealisation, of exaggeration and gratitude for (as it were) unlimited nourishment. The tendency in learners' accounts towards an 'idealisation'

of learning support workers suggests that fears and anxieties about not belonging, not achieving or not having one's needs met may be ameliorated in a number of ways by such a relationship.

Lloyd (SFC) explained that he was pleased to have learning support:

'(…) because I got someone extra there for me and like I say, if I'm having a bit of trouble in the class and I don't really want to speak to the teacher, I could just come to [learning support] and speak to the [LSW] there. Which I'm more than happy with because like, I've got someone else there for me if I can't speak to any other of my teachers.'

Ganaway (1976) observes that an 'ideal' teacher for the pupils in his study was someone who had humour and showed understanding. It was also someone who could 'keep order'. In the current study, it was the LSWs who were most valued and to whom the learners said they turned for protection and containment.

Luke (SFC) was asked how it felt to have learning support and said:

L: 'It is a very, very good feeling.'
I: 'Tell me what it feels like?'
L: 'It's like as if now, I can go and sit in an exam and not panic or anything like that, that I know that with the support I've had they make you remember things that you can just pull out which has really, really helped me over the last year.'

Woods (1990) and Lucey & Reay (2002a) found children's feelings of vulnerability would encourage them to put in place a fantasy or idealised version of a parental figure who would set boundaries and limits and thus create a safe enough environment and a secure relationship in which children could view themselves more positively as 'learners.' In our study, involving some of the most vulnerable learners in post-compulsory education and training, it appears that this parental figure is the LSW, rather the teacher. It was the LSW who would be there in times of stress and their constant availability was perceived as a key benefit.

Kathryn (WBL) placed a high value on the exclusivity of her relationship with the LSW:

'Yeah because, like, having it one to one, I mean I've got her full attention and she gives me everything that I sort of need to know, one to one. Like with a group she'd be trying to help everybody and you wouldn't get her full attention really, so it's much better.'

For Linda (SFC), the uninterrupted individual attention was also important:

'Because it's one on one basis, it's a lot better 'cos you get the entire… whereas the teacher's got to go round like the whole class.'

The relationship with her LSW is not one she has to share with her classmates (or, as in the psychoanalytic account, with another parent or her siblings). It is exclusive and

there are no rivals for the attention of this 'good mother' whose resources (particularly in comparison to those of the teacher) appear unlimited.

Carol's past situation which she described (above) as 'a nightmare really' was also transformed with the help of the support workers:

'They gave me work experience, I got loads of awards. I got my flat. They helped me with a lot of things but when I first came I didn't know where I were, you know? They got me, they made me, they put me here and they got me into like a group and got me to make friends and my confidence has gone up a lot since I've been here'.

It is a story of restoration and a return to 'wholeness'. Carol's account of the support worker's role in her recovery (*They got me, they made me, they put me here...*) is testament to a belief in the capacity of another (positioned here as a caring parental figure) to take control and assist in a creative healing process.

In her interview, Sharon (FE) (who has learning difficulties) suggested that without learning support, it would not be possible for her to come to college. She described learning support as a 'god send':

'(…) because without support I can't go to college; it's… I'd rather have someone differentiating it for me, rather than being in class. I'd rather be in student support all day than be in class but that's just the way it is.'

Not all respondents gave unconditionally positive reports of their encounters with LSWs but in the few cases where discomfort and conflict were reported, there was nevertheless an overall insistence on the value of these relationships. In their talk, learners tended to position themselves as socially and psychologically 'needy' and the LSW as 'rescuer' and ideal helpmate.

Discussion & Conclusions

The importance of understanding the 'whole' text in qualitative data analysis is emphasised by Hollway & Jefferson (2000). The Gestalt principle that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts suggests that attention should be paid here to both the context for learning support and the role and experience of learning support itself. The various difficulties and 'anxieties' recounted by learners of various ages in diverse post-compulsory organisations (including FE, SFC, WBL and ACL providers) suggests that there may be unacknowledged 'strains' within wider educational contexts that coalesce in the FE system. As noted, the respondents who took part in this study were (by their own account and for widely differing reasons) amongst the most vulnerable of learners, and their responses indicate that (for them) a range of difficulties and deficits may exist in conventional learning contexts, particularly those where less individual support is available.

In the context of such anxieties and stresses as were reported in the interviews, we argue that the respondents' tendency to 'idealise' their LSW can be understood as a psychic defence mechanism that enables the separation and preservation of good aspects of the self. The feelings of relief and gratitude need to be understood as

responses to experiences within the education system and within wider society that have had not just social and economic but psychic and emotional costs as well.

Hoggett (2006) argues that the purpose of public organisations is continuously contested. Questions about values and policies are played out in these organisations which are part of the public sphere. Applying Klein's work, he argues that citizens project onto government all that they cannot contain within themselves. His view is that public institutions

'play a vital role in 'containing' some of the troubling feelings that characterise citizens' lives and that anxiety seems to be the most powerful of these.' (p.180)

The study reported here suggests that organisations and institutions within the FE system may indeed act as 'receptacles' for anxiety, in the way Hoggett describes. An acceptance of this perspective would lead to an understanding of these organisations as having multiple and often contradictory purposes and tasks, rather than one primary function. Thus, in Hoggett's view, our aim should be to seek more integrated and realistic roles for our public organisations.

In the context of post-compulsory education and training, this would suggest less emphasis on ways of enhancing and measuring educational 'performance' and more acceptance by policy-makers, institutions and practitioners of the importance and complexity of learners' emotional and psychic experiences. Data reported in this study frequently relate to learners' feelings about the frustration and failure they have experienced previously within the education system or more widely. Such feelings are likely to have an impact on learning in the ways described but are not often acknowledged by policy-makers who currently tend to characterise these learners' needs in terms of skills, qualifications and 'levels'. This is the case with regard to many young people and adults whose earlier experiences of education have been negative. In particular, if official targets for participation in learning at age 17-18 are to be achieved, then the needs of those in this age group hitherto 'selected out' of further participation in education will have to be addressed more effectively.

Acknowledgement

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