**Equity Groups: Mature Age Students**

Literature review

The literature on mature age students in higher education (HE) focuses on the experiences of mature age students navigating through university, the factors that influence their experiences, and issues that hinder their successful educational outcomes. Consequently, the literature offers recommendations to improve the experiences and educational outcomes of mature age students in higher education. Findings from Bowl’s (2010) study, which explored the barriers impeding the successful transition of mature age students in HE via three case studies, suggest that there are several factors that significantly impact the transition of this equity group in HE. These include insufficient funding, lack of childcare, difficulties encountered with the benefits system, and the lack of response of institutions towards their needs (Bowl, 2010). Similarly, in their work on the support provided for mature students from low SES backgrounds, Tones, Fraser, Elder and White (2009) discovered that barriers which hinder the participation of these students in HE include conflicting responsibilities and difficulties in adjusting to university life. In addition, findings from their study also suggest a critical lack of awareness on the support available, and uncertainty on ways to access this support, as mentioned by 76% of low SES students in the study, which often prevents them from accessing the support services at university (Tones et al., 2009). The authors therefore suggest the implementation of more social events for mature age students at university, to enable them to cope better with adjusting to university life, as well as a greater flexibility in course delivery, to accommodate the varying responsibilities of these students. In addition, Shaw’s (2014) study investigating the problems faced by part-time mature age students at university highlights the financial burden faced by these students due to their increasing student loans and debts. Findings from his study, which investigated the problems of 212 students at one university and four FE colleges, suggest that confusion about fees, debt aversion and a lack of concern for part-time students in HE inhibit the government advocacy for life-long learning (Shaw, 2014). The study also highlights gendered differences in the financial burdens faced, where “so many of the female respondents [compared with none of the male participants] showed in considering higher education for themselves in a situation where they would be inflicting, in their view, a burden of debt on their whole family, and possibly jeopardising their children’s opportunities to go to college or university” (p.848–9).

On the other hand, Mallman and Lee (2017) investigate the experiences of young mature age (YMA) students at university, through a student led ethnography with 101 participants. Findings from their study suggest that YMA learners often felt like the ‘odd-one-out’ (p. 517), as they had difficulties relating to both school-leavers and mature-age students at university. The students therefore faced barriers in establishing social connections with other groups of students in their HE institutions, which hindered their full participation at university (Mallman & Lee, 2017). The authors therefore argue the crucial need to ‘expand and complexify’ student categories in HE to support this distinct cohort of older learners (Mallman & Lee, 2017). Similarly, Moreau and Kerner (2015) problematise the categorisation of mature age students in HE, with a focus on the conflation of student parents and mature age students. Findings from their study suggest that 9 out of 10 universities investigated in the study did not collect information on student parents, causing them to be ‘largely invisible’ (Moreau & Kerner, p. 216) in HE institutions. As a result, the participation of student parents in HE is often impeded due to the lack of support in managing significant challenges such as time constraints, health problems (sleep deprivation), emotional issues including guilt, depression and feelings of ‘missing out’ or ‘not fitting in’ and financial difficulties (Moreau & Kerner, 2015). Waller (2006) also argues against the simplistic representations of mature age students in HE, contending that ‘mature students en masse are not the homogenous group portrayed in much early research’ (p. 126). Waller (2006) further highlights the diversity of the mature age student cohort, by asserting they cannot be ‘satisfactorily further divided into a series of distinct categories or sub-groups’ (p. 126).

Besides the barriers faced by mature age students in HE, the literature also highlights factors that facilitate their successful participation and consequent educational outcomes. Heagney & Benson (2017) conducted an in-depth case study with 11 mature age students to identify how mature age students succeed in Australian HE and the consequent implications for institutional support. The key factor factors identified to facilitate students’ participation include support of family and friends, which was cited by participants as ‘paramount’ in providing financial, emotional and childcare or housework support (Heagney & Benson, 2017). In addition, academic support, regular and prompt feedback, curriculum design and as well as institutional support, especially the flexibility to switch from full to part time mode of study were also cited as factors influencing the success of mature age students at university (Heagney & Benson, 2017). However, participants cited the limitations of academic support in terms of access, especially for remote or off-campus students (Heagney & Benson, 2017). The authors thus offered recommendations from Benson et al.’s (2013) study to enhance the experience of mature age students in HE, and their consequent educational outcomes. These include facilitating peer interaction and practical learning, offering constant feedback and encouragement, allowing for flexibility, and promoting ‘student-centred access to information and services’ (p. 227). Apart from that, Pearce and Brown’s (2011) study explores the cultural and pedagogical conditions which promote the engagement of 16 mature-age students in a regional university. Findings from the study highlight the significance of relational pedagogy which emphasises relationship building, to promote student learning, especially for mature age students who face significant cultural and economic issues, and have previously felt marginalised in HE institutions (Pearce & Brown, 2011). O’Shea (2016) also investigates the knowledge and skills facilitating the transition of first-in-family mature age learners to university. Findings from O’Shea’s (2016) study highlighted the importance of capital, including aspirational, social and familial capital in assisting student transition. However, the findings also highlight the lack of experiential capital among the students, which impedes their transition process (O’Shea, 2016). O’Shea (2016) thus asserts the importance of targeted support and outreach programs to support the transition of first in family mature age students to university.

The literature on mature age students and equity in HE therefore points towards socio-economic, relational and institutional factors that could either promote or impede the full participation of mature age students in HE, and their attainment of successful educational outcomes.

Summary by Anna Xavier

**References**

Bowl, M. (2010). Experiencing the barriers: non-traditional students entering higher education, *Research Papers in Education,* 16(2), 141–160.

Heagney, M. & Benson, R. (2017). How mature-age students succeed in higher education: implications for institutional support, *Journal of Educational Policy and Management,* 39(3), 216–234.

Mallman, M. & Lee, H. (2017). Isolated learners: young mature-age students, university culture, and desire for academic sociality, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 36(5), 512–525.

Moreau, M.P. & Kerner, C. (2015). Care in academia: an exploration of student parents’ experiences, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 36(2), 215–233.

O’Shea, S. (2016). Navigating the knowledge sets of older learners: Exploring the capitals of first-in-family mature age students, *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning,* 18(3), 34–54.

Pearce, J. & Down, B. (2011). Relational pedagogy for student engagement and success at university, *The Australian Educational Researcher,* 38(4), 483–494.

Shaw, A. (2014). Examining the potential impact of full tuition fees on mature part-time students in English higher education, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 38(6), 838–850.

Tones, M.; Fraser, J.; Elder, R.; & White, K. (2009). Supporting mature-aged students from a low socioeconomic background, *Higher Education,* 58, 505–529.

Waller, R. (2006). ‘I don’t feel like ‘a student’, I feel like ‘me’!’: the over‐simplification of mature learners’ experience(s), *Research in Post‐Compulsory Education*, 11(1), 115–130.

**Equity and Higher Education Annotated Bibliography Series**

**Equity Groups: Mature Age Students**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Citation** | **Annotation** |
| Alsop, R.; Gonzalez-Arnal, S. & Kilkey, M. (2008). [The widening participation agenda: the marginal place of care](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09540250802215235), *Gender and Education,* 20(6), 623 –637.UKAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: *higher education; widening participation; care; mature students; gender* | **Context:** Mature WP students in UK/ English HE. Scopes participation of mature age students in English HE, noting decrease since mid 90s (perhaps due to increase in student contribution to costs) and ineligibility of mature age students to access student loans**Aim:** To explore how care-giving responsibilities mediate/ interact with mature students’ experiences of higher education; to examine how care is recognised in HE policy.**Theoretical frame:** Feminist conceptualisations of care – important lens because of gendered division of care. Notes shifting paradigms in terms of how care has been understood: from ‘exploitation paradigm’ in 1970s (unpaid care, domestic servitude), to the ‘ethical/moral paradigm’ in the 1980s (celebrating women’s capacity to care), ‘sociological notion of care’ (care as embedded in social relations and shaped by normative structures), ‘paradigm of difference’ in the 1990s (difference in terms of power, sites, contexts and strategies of care), and ‘universalistic paradigm’ (values and meanings in care/ caring/ citizenship) = all see Williams, 2001; on p.625. Daly & Lewis (2000): care as multidimensional concept: care as labour, care as social and relational, care as an activity with costs. Definition offered by authors: “a physical and emotional practice, involving a moral orientation which, though not rooted in essentialist gender differences, is located within gendered (and racialised) normative frameworks around obligations and responsibilities, particularly in relation to the family.Moreover, care involves costs that are similarly multidimensional, encompassing financial, temporal, emotional, and identity elements” (p.625).**Methodology:** Draws on 2 studies with WP students at Uni of Hull: 1) quant study: baseline data on characteristics and experiences of non-traditional students (under-represented areas, disabilities, mature, p/t) + comparison with ‘traditional’ students = random sample from institutional student records in Health Studies (n=1000). Second study = qualitative approach with 24 face-to-face interviews with current or former students (mature, disable, minority ethnic, p/t)**Findings:** Quant study49% WP students had caring responsibilities (mostly mature and female; 6% caring for an adult)Qual study:Lack of time and money = main obstacles, particularly cost on emotional part of caring role (especially for females/ mothers)Balancing time = difficult for both f/t and p/t students; flexibility from staff/ institution = crucialStudent-carers need to know timetables well in advance to organise care schedulesAccessibility of courses/ services (geographically/ temporally) = significantCost of transport = problematic, meaning that many students minimised journeys on campus. Mature age students = more likely to travel further and less likely to walk (parking = issue)For p/t students, isolation and feeling disconnected = problematic, with both p/t and f/t student-carers prioritising formal academic activities over other activitiesGendered nature of care = plays out at home, with students suggesting that they had to do ‘second shift’ at home (female partners of male students appeared to be more receptive to changing their lives to accommodate partner’s studies)Policy review: care-giving responsibilities were acknowledged (at time of publication) but with limitations. For example, Childcare grant could only be used with particular childcare (no formal recognition of informal childcare arrangements with family/ friends), and part-time students = ineligible, and it was means-tested. This kind of support = complex to claim and stigmatising. Flexibility suggested in 2003 White Paper did not acknowledge the challenge these suggestions would place on care-givers (e.g. compressed courses running through summer term/ school holidays). All jostle with New Labour’s policies on ‘work-life balance’. Changes proposed to increase student contributions = more risky for mature age students**Core argument:** Care-giving responsibilities = significant in shaping experiences of HE. When staff/ institution offer flexibility (“creative and compassionate thinking”) to student-carers = has a “hugely positive impact upon their ability to study successfully” (p.633), but lacking =overarching systemic commitment to acknowledging needs of student-carers. At macro/policy level, where care is recognized = financial level, but with limitations and prescriptions. Universities need to take up Williams’ (2001) ‘political ethics of care’ – through production of good practice guidelines |
| Archer, L. & Hutchings, M. (2000). ‘[Bettering Yourself’? Discourses of Risk, Cost and Benefit in Ethnically Diverse, Young Working-Class Non-Participants’ Constructions of Higher Education](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/713655373), *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* 21(4), 555–574.UKAnnotation by Sally Baker | **Context:** Widening participation in English HE, post-New Labour election and new imposition of 50% target, viewed from perspectives of working class non-participants. Contrasts institutional position statements on WP with what is known about working-class constructions/ perceptions about HE (noting arguments that HE is viewed in alignment with employment; see argument that HE was perceived as irrelevant by working class because of job opportunities available; Metcalf, 1997). Notes work by Reay (1998, Reay et al., 2001) on classed and racialised expectations of higher education – middle class ‘common sense’ with relation to unequal distribution of power and access to resources**Aim:** To argue that risk and benefits of participating in higher education = unequally distributed according to social class and is therefore “more difficult and costly ‘choice’ for working-class students” (p.555); “to contribute to an analysis of the multiple factors underpinning ‘working-class’ participation in higher education” (p.556)**Theoretical frame:****Methodology:** Draws on MORI-funded large scale mixed methods study of educational decision-making/ constructions of HE for working-class students and non-participants. Paper reports on qualitiative data collected via 14 x focus groups with 109 working-class non-participants in London aged 16-30. 10 of groups recruited from FE colleges; 4 groups = recruited from general public; these 4 = deliberately mixed by gender and ethnicity (white/ African Caribbean)/ 10 from FE = more ad hoc. 1/3 = Black, 1/3 = Asian, 1/3 = White. Most (n=72) taking Level 1 or 2 vocational courses; 16 = taking Level 3; 21 = not studying – most had left school at 16 to start work**Findings:** Participants “constructed HE aspirations, and the ability to 'get there', as mediated by the risks and costs that they themselves would experience**”** (p.560) – risks in terms of time, money and effort. Main benefits = family expectations. Participants associated few benefits with studying at university; instead seeing it as ‘boring’, ‘hard work’, ‘pressure and stress’ (see p.560). Some viewed university as associated with sex and drinking, but not enough to outweigh other perceived costs. Participants also acknowledged lack of network (that middle-class peers may have) for support. Possibility of failure = most common perceived risk, with failure “constructed in economic, social and personal terms” (p.561), and familial pressure (not letting parents down/ wasting parents’ money), particularly for Black and Asian participants. Many participants perceived themselves as disadvantaged by mature age, FE/ vocational qualifications, money, perception of HE as middle class, white: some data “can be read as drawing on white working-class notions of territoriality that exclude ethnic-minority groups and deny them equal access to resources” (p.563) = ‘racist resistance’ (Cohen, 1988).*Post-graduation perceptions*: most viewed benefits of graduating at individual level = only African/Caribbean women talked about community/ national economic benefits. Many of benefits construed as ‘better job opportunties’ (not ‘getting stuck; see p.564) and therefore ‘better pay’ and ‘bettering oneself’ and pleasing parents/ family, especially for immigrant children (See Mirza 1992 for arguments about black women in HE and Skeggs (1997) for discussion of working class women in HE) Some participants expressed concern about being ‘overqualified in an overcrowded job market’ – this discourse used more by participants who didn’t want to go to university. Authors note literature that points to further disadvantage for working-class students who are constrained to attend local, less prestigious institutions.Participants concerned with debt**Core argument:** Young working-class people generally index dominant discourses about individual (economic and employment) benefits of HE but construct HE as “**i**nherently risky, demanding great investment and costs, and yielding uncertain return” (p.569) |
| Bowl, M. (2010). [Experiencing the barriers: non-traditional students entering higher education](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02671520110037410), *Research Papers in Education,* 16(2), 141–160.UKAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: *access, higher education, participation, non-traditional students* | **Context:** Follows 32 non-traditional students as they transitioned into higher education. Set in post-New Labour election in 1997 context. Scopes literature on mature age students – many researchers = argued that change in access needs change in institutional structure and culture, particularly foregrounding issues of race/ ethnicity**Aim:** To describe mature age students’ transitions**Theoretical frame:****Methodology:** Qualitative and longitudinal: critical, illuminative, feminist methodology (p.143). Participatory action research design – purposefully intending to facilitate mature age students speaking to academics; presents case studies of 3 students (adults, inner-city, involved in ‘community-based, flexible access programs’: REACHOUT project). Discussion with participants recorded according to daily encounters and weekly diary. Individual interviews conducted over two years. Participants took part in student conference (with emancipatory intention)**Findings:** Issues/ concerns mentioned by students:Inadequate funding, lack of childcare, difficulty with benefits system, ‘unresponsiveness’ of institutions.3 case studies: Salma, Helen and RuthSalma: did well at school, not supported to progress by parents, married, 2 children, separated. Did flexible access program via REACHOUT – passed in 6 months – studied Social Policy at RG university. Fees and benefits = issue; struggle to survive over Christmas holidays, had to borrow money to buy computer (only one who couldn’t afford a computer): “Looking back, she felt that she had survived in spite of the university, rather thanbecause of the support offered to her” (p.147).Helen = Jamaican, began school in England when 11, grew up in very white community (15/200 children = black), differences in language (as patois speaker) = marker of difference, parents not familiar with education system, marginalized and discouraged at school, married, 4 children, partner deserted her, wife of vicar recommended REACHOUT – paid for childcare costs. Accepted to train as social worker – struggled with writing demands, financial demands, childcare responsibilities. Passed course but initially too ill to start work.Ruth = Jamaican, poor, accent = marker of difference, mother couldn’t/didn’t encourage her. Ruth ran away from home, missed school exams, did YTS in catering, worked as club dancer, moved to Germany, married, studied Beauty Therapy in German language. Did REACHOUT part time – passed with high marks but felt on margins as part time student.Key themes: school days + experiences of difference, lack of family support/ knowledge, frustration, anticipating change, entry to university, financial problems, time poverty, institutional barriers**Core argument: …**“the non-traditional student as a frustrated participant in an unresponsive institutional context and questions the tendency to problematize students from non-traditional backgrounds, rather than the educational institutions responsible for their progress” (abstract). Transition to highereducation “has complex practical and emotional implications” (p.157). Dislocation = gendered, classed, ethnic lines against the institution and ‘traditional’ students. |
| Brennan, J. & Osborne, M. (2008). [Higher education’s many diversities: of students, institutions and experiences; and outcomes?,](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02671520802048711) *Research Papers in Education,* 23(2), 179–190.UKAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: *universities; diversity; student experience; learning outcomes; differentiation; higher education* | **Context:** Works from understanding that there are multiple scales of diversity operating in higher education, drawing on Teichler’s (2007) dichotomous conceptualisation of horizontal and vertical forms of differentiation in higher education (horizontal = program differences, subjects, links with industry; vertical = status and prestige). Paper situated in UK (English) stratified HE system**Aim:** To examine how multiple differences (students and universities) combine to form diverse outcomes and experiences; to “consider how institutional forms of diversity interact with the diversity of the students’ backgrounds… combine to generate differences in student experiences of higher education and whether these different experiences lead to differences in the outcomes of study” (p.180) **Conceptual frame:** Classifies student diversity as inter-related categories: i*mported differences* (demographic issues) – linked to lack of proportional parity; *generated differences* = lifestyle choices/ necessities; *internally generated* = different levels of engagement with in-class and outside learningInstitutional diversity = draws on Bernstein’s concepts of classification and framing of knowledge in curricula – making visible and invisible pedagogies. Also draws on Nespor’s (1994) theory of actor network (space-contingent, space-forming: “The implication for what students learn is connected to the extent to which disciplinescapture students within particular material and social spaces and compress their time” – see p.182)**Methodology:** Mixed methods, longitudinal (broader study = 4 years). Case studies (x 15) of ‘entering’ and ‘exiting’ students in bioscience, business studies and sociology. Analysis differentiated along two lines: extent experience = individual or shared, and extent of diversity within particular courses**Findings:** Acknowledges diversity but analysis points to how “social and organisational factors can combineto shape the collective experiences of students to an important degree” (p.184)Perceives 3 types of experiences of diversity:* Type A: Shared experience and high student diversity (conjecture = “would provide opportunities for learning from difference”)
* Type B: Shared experience and low student diversity (conjecture = “would be more about maintaining difference”)
* Type C: Individualised student experience (conjecture = “would be about living with difference, suggesting the maintenance and construction of multiple identities”) – all p.184

8/15 cases = Type B – reflecting traditional features of HE “relatively low diversity of intakes and reasonably high levels of shared experience of students, typically living away from home for the first time, just having left school and having few commitments outside the university” p.184 = 7/8 cases = pre-1992 universities.7/15 = 3 x Type A; 4 x Type C = only 1 = pre-1992Type B = divided into 2 cases: shared experience by course or by university (latter= 5/8)Type C = typically local, mature age students with home/work commitmentsTrends in student/experience types:Type C = lower self-confidence and less likely to retain university friends after graduation, less likely to feel belonging, most likely to say ‘qualification = main thing’Type B = massively more likely to state connection to institution and perceive ability to get on with range of people, more likely to emphasise ‘life changing’ experience of university studyType A = similar to B but more likely to continue with subject and less likely to see world view as having changed.Similarities in experience:Commonality in top two statements: gains in self-confidence and able to get on with people; diversity in 3rd (see p.187) = for Type C, life outside of university = high importance. Also, rating personal confidence and social networks over academic/ low commitment to subjects = common**Core argument:** Important = “not to view institutional diversity as being completely distinct from student diversity” (p.183) |
| Brooks, R. (2012). [Student-parents and higher education: a cross-national comparison](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02680939.2011.613598), *Journal of Educational Policy,* 27(3), 423–439.UKAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: comparative, qualitativeCARE | **Context:** Widening participation, parenthood/ parenting and higher education in the UK, particularly with the New Labour focus on increasing participation of mature age students (but makes point that not all mature students are also parents, and not all student-parents are mature). Notes literature that argues the neoliberal focus has eroded the focus on systemic/ structure inequalities, resulting in the ‘blame’ for failure being shifted to individuals; she also notes literature that points to the significance of gender, and recognises the need to view student-parents as heterogeneous group**Aim:** To present on findings from a Nuffield-funded cross-institutional study of support offered to student-parents**Theoretical frame:** Social constructionist theoretical framework**Methodology:** International comparison of support and experiences of student-parents in different national ‘welfare regimes’: UK (liberal regime); Denmark (social democratic regime). Data collected from two different universities within each country (categorised as ‘older’ and ‘newer’). Data collected: institutional policies and other material that focuses on student-parents, as well as on childcare and financial support; individual interviews with staff members responsible for student welfare; individual students (n=15-20) from each institution. Analysis of transcripts and documents paid particular attention to structural constraints, as well as cultural and attitudinal influences.**Findings:** Structural differences between UK and Denmark (summarised in Table 2; p.427) – clear differences between the countries (tuition fees in UK; tuition free to students in DK; no parental leave in UK, all students entitled to it in DK and offered additional grant; flexible modes at academics’ discretion in UK, required by the state in DK; childcare = limited in UK, extensive provision and low cost in DK). Cultural/ attitudinal differences: in UK = ideal learner (see literature) constructions = internalised and ‘others’ develop. Sense from staff in UK that academics largely view students as school leavers (author later describes UK attitude as ‘hostile’, p.432). Also sense that parents as group seen as unprepared. In comparison, in DK = different organisational culture that seemingly better recognises diversity among students. For example, one staff member talked about how s/he encourages students to talk about other commitments before embarking on group project to familiarise others with competing responsibilities. No similar ‘ideal student’ in DK; rather student-parents = valorised for balanced attitudes. Policies in DK that promote ‘dual worker’ (rather than ‘male breadwinner’) underpin the cultural and attitudinal/ policy differences between UK and DK – in DK, it is unusual for mum to stay at home as primary carer and not workInstitutional differences = some in DK (see p.432 for detail). In UK = greater inter-institutional variation: the older university provided “significant” practical support (childcare facilities, holiday clubs, dedicated bursaries), but this is unusual. Level of support at newer university = more representative = no dedicated childcare, no staff dedicated to supporting parents, no financial support except central financial support. When discussed in past, university has discussed in terms of potential revenue from childcare, rather than as service to students. Author suggests that older university might be better placed to offer such provision because it has more wealth/resources (and makes links to similar findings in US literature). Dominant constructions of ‘the student’ differed between older and newer UK universities (p.434). In older university, the higher level of practical support = in “considerable tension” with the culture and attitudes of staff/ the university**Core argument:** There are clear differences in how student-parents are supported (or not) between a liberal welfare system (UK) and social democratic (DK). While the two universities (older and newer) in DK treated student-parents relatively similarly, the UK universities showed great difference in terms of how they support and view student-parents, which is reflective of the market-oriented neoliberal higher education system. |
| Busher, H.; James, N.; Piela, A.; & Palmer, A. (2014). [Transforming marginalized adult learners’ views of themselves: Access to Higher Education courses in England](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01425692.2014.919842), *British Journal of Sociology in Education,* 35(5), 800–817.UKAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: *widening participation; marginalisation; adult education; power; socio-political contexts* | **Context:** Adult learners in UK Access to HE courses in Further Education (FE) colleges; learner identity/ies. Describes mature age students in this space in terms of lacking confidence with education, in a process of re/construction, lack belief in habitus to support studies. Gives background information about Access courses (p.801), noting the explicit link with widening participation agenda**Aim:** To explore how Access students explored the ‘project of the self’ (Giddens, 1991) in order to enhance capital (Bourdieu, 1990), and how their project are impacted by discourses (Foucault, 1977) and interactions with powerful agents (teachers) and whether these generate communities of practice (Wenger, 1998); to investigate “the perspectives of marginalised adult learners, who were students on Access to HE courses, on their past and present learning experiences, on the transformation of their views of themselves as learners during the Access to HE courses, and on the impact on their learning of their socio-economic contexts and their relationships with their families, friends, Access to HE tutors and fellow students” (p.805).**Theoretical frame:** Draws on community of practice (Wenger, 1998); Bourdieu (capital and habitus), postmodern identity theory (Bauman, 2000), discourse (Foucault, 1977); organisational culture; choice (Ball, 1987)**Methodology:** Social constructivist (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and linked case-study: 7 FE colleges across East Midlands between 2012/13, using mixed methods: questionnaires (pre-/ post-course) and focus groups x 3 with students. Access teachers interviewed (individual or small group). Questionnaires (n=365) = 70% female; analysed for ‘simple descriptive statistics’. Interviews = grounded theory analysis + visual data (concept maps) showing students’ perceptions of transitions**Findings:** Four main themes: significant others/ developing self; sense of community; student self-development; facilitating learning through community*Significant others/ developing self*: variety of processes, policies and discourses had to be navigated/negotiated, partly as a result of having to adapt to full-time load of Access course (e.g. working part-time/ negotiating with employers). ‘Agencies of the state’ (e.g. Job Centre) = inflexible. Financial constraints = challenging. Students appeared to be parroting state-driven neoliberal discourse (development of self; be better people/ get a better career). Consternation that Access courses = not free.*Student self-development*: tutors perceived as different from teachers at school; perception that students = treated as adults/ tutors = facilitators. Tutors’ supportive relationships perceived as helping students to see strengths and weaknesses and viewed as “car[ing] for the whole person and not just the academic aspects of student development” (p.809). However, the power dynamic was clear through practices such as taking the register.*Sense of community*: Access courses = important sites for transition because of possibilities for social networks. Sense of being part of a group and peer-to-peer support = significant.*Facilitating learning through community*: Sense of responsibility as individuals and as a community**Core argument:** Students’ struggles provided motivation to start Access course: “strengthened theirresolutions to do something with their lives that contributed to the social wellbeing of their society” (p.815), but central government = impediment to success; Access course helped to develop identity as a learner; tutors play important periphery/ boundary role (but impact of power/ hierarchy). |
| Chesters, J. & Watson, L. (2014). [Returns to education for those returning to education: evidence from Australia,](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03075079.2013.801422) *Studies in Higher Education,* 39(9), 1643–1648.AUSAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: *mature-age students, employment, earnings, widening participation* | **Context:** focuses on mature age students (25+) and compares ‘the returns of education’ for young and mature age graduates between 2001-2009. Questions the assumption that higher education brings returns to all students, especially mature age students. Works from context of rapid socioeconomic change and Bradley targets to expand higher education.**Aim:** To “consider whether those who undertake university education at a later stage in their life enjoy similar rewards to those who transition directly from secondary school to university” (p.1635). Do mature age students get same levels of FT employment as younger graduates and does it have same effect on earnings?**Theoretical frame:** Discusses human capital theory (based on assumption that personal investment in education delivers high personal returns because of increased productivity in labour market); rational choice theory = individuals are able to estimate probable returns on investment but are constrained by class position; subjective expected utility theory assumes that individuals will calculate future financial returns that will accrue from various educational options and then select the option that offers ‘highest expected net utility’ (all p.1637). Thus = assumption (based on 3 theories) that investment in education has direct and indirect costs and benefits for individuals, thus “mature-age students face substantial risks and costs in embarking on higher education” in terms of getting adequate/expected return on investment (p.1638).**Methodology:** Quantitative/ statistical. Uses data from HILDA (Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia; nine waves: 2001-2009). In 2001, 13969 people aged 15+ participated (representative of national population) and returns annually. This study used 3 points: year before graduation, year of graduation, and year after graduation (thus = between 2002-2008). Two dependent variables = employment status and earnings and five independent variables: sex; father’s education; mother’s education; age at graduation; and socio-economic status in the year before graduation**Findings:** Employment statusYear before graduation: 7% of younger group **FT employed** compared to 27% of older groupYear of graduation: 32% of younger group FT employed compared to 47% of older groupYear after graduation: 58% of younger group FT employed compared to 69% of older groupYear before graduation: 20% of younger group **unemployed** compared to 34% of older groupYear after graduation: 9% of younger group unemployed compared to 8% of older group\EarningsEffect is similar for both groupsBetween Time 1-2, younger group had average increase in earnings by $169 per week. Between T2-3, younger group had increased earnings by $428 per week.Between Time 1-2, mature group had average increase in earnings by $171 per week. Between T2-3, mature group had increased earnings by $465 per week.One year after graduation, gender has no difference but it does in Yr 2 and 3 after graduationEffect of age (privileging mature age) declines over time (by year 3 post-graduation = statistically significant difference between two groups), suggesting “the returns to education are lower for mature-age graduatescompared to younger graduates” (p.1645).Summary: “Although mature-age graduates were more likely to reside in less-advantaged areas, be the first person in their family to attend university, and were less likely to be employed in the year before graduation, they were more likely to be employed on a full-time basis one year after graduation than younger graduates” (p.1644).**Core argument:** Initially the returns of education = similar. Age is not a barrier: “age is not a barrier to improving one’s human capital and enjoying the economic rewards of doing so” (p.1643), aligning with hypothesis of human capital theory |
| Christensen, L. & Evamy, S. (2011). [MAPs to Success: Improving the First Year Experience of alternative entry](https://fyhejournal.com/article/view/83/91.html)[mature age students](https://fyhejournal.com/article/view/83/91.html), *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education,* 2(2), 35–48.AUSAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: *mature age; fye; equity* | **Context:** Describes equity as needing ‘coherent blend’ of admin, social and academic support. Describes MAPS to Success access scheme at UWA for ‘underprepared mature age students’. UWA – Go8 – highest proportion (90%) of school leavers. MAP to Success related to MAP scheme (Mature age Access Pathway) which began in 2008. MAPS to Success “was devised to make more explicit links to existing services as well as developing MAP-specific activities to ensure that the academic and support needs of these— and subsequent MAP students— were adequately met” (p.37). Aims of program = increase 2, reduce harm to students (incurring debt/ personal cost) – p.37**Methodology:** Description**Findings:** MAPS to SuccessPre-semester: all applicants have to attend Information Session (one in evening; one in morning to accommodate ‘non-traditional’ students. Students have to complete a diagnostic test (MCQ/ writing task) – each student then given a Learning Action Plan (recommended/ optional activities change for each individual depending on results of diagnostic). If student needs to be FT because of Centrelink and needs ‘high levels of support’, they are advised to take minimum 3 units to qualify rather than 4. Each year = 80-100 studentsThroughout semester: All students recommended to attend an interview in first 5 weeks. Students required one-to-one consultation if student fails any units; optional one-to-one interview in Semester 2. Social activities run/ specific-MAPS ‘study skills’ workshops.Steady increase in number of MAPS students; “small but definite improvement” in outcomes: fewer are withdrawing; rate at which MAP students complete units to become provisional is increasing**Core argument:** Says nothing of note. All descriptive. No reflexivity or theorisation evident. |
| Cullity, M. (2006). [Challenges in understanding and assisting mature-age students who participate in alternative entry programs](https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ797595.pdf), *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 46(2), 175–201.AUSAnnotation by Sally Baker | **Context:** Explores experiences of mature-age students within Australian sub-degree cohort/ alternative entry pathway program. Mature age students = contribute to diversified student cohort. At time of writing, author claims there were 13/44 universities that offered Alternative Entry Programs (AEPs) which provide admission for mature students who did not meet ‘traditional’ entry requirements. AEPs = introduce academic culture, including practices and expectations. Alternative access schemes: STAT/ Special Entry Provision/ admissions test/ pre-admissions exam/ ‘other basis’ = enabling programs. Few universities published data (in 2006) on numbers of mature age students. Data presented on p.180 (from DEST) suggests that mature age students prefer enabling courses (in terms of numbers entering via). 20-30 years olds most likely to enter via ‘other basis’/ AEP. AEPs could include enabling courses (Open Foundation mentioned on p.185) but this is not made explicit.**Aim:** To illustrate how mature students’ decisions to attend an AEP are influenced by a complex mix of adult circumstances (p.177) – taken from case study of nature and outcomes of AEPs for mature age students (not including NESB or indigenous students).**Methodology:** Literature review/discussion paper**Key points**: More women than men enrol in AEPs; women who were early school leavers or had been prohibited from further study = most keen to enrol in AEPs = ‘catch up education’ (p.182). Limited data on equity groupings. People from low SES background/rural or regional background = most likely to enter AEP. Generally = Australian, non-indigenous, English speaking students access AEPs – generally universities offer specialist courses for indigenous students and ‘international students’ [author seems to be conflating NESB and international students].Interviews with staff reflect perception that demographic is shifting from women in middle-income households to broader mix of people: “They are a younger, fragile, less skilled, less confident student … The traditional upper-middle-class mum has changed to a broader demographic: people with mental illness, more peoplewith issues (Cullity 2005: 182). Notes increase in numbers of unemployed people on benefitsPedagogical implications: draws on New Literacy Studies work that points to gaps in expectations and realities in terms of students’ knowledges, practices and expectations (regarding literacies). Also draws on ‘approaches to learning’ literatureChallenges: lack of understanding of mature age learners’ backgrounds/ characteristics of mature age learners = limitation**Relevance for our project:** |
| Fenge, L. (2011). [‘A second chance at learning but it’s not quite higher education’: experience of a foundation degree](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0309877X.2011.569013), *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* 35(3), 375–390.UKAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: *foundation degree; HE in FE; mature learners; sensemaking; Bourdieu*  | **Context:** Experiences of mature age students in a foundation degree (FD) in health and social care. FDs are generally taught in Further Education (FE) colleges in the UK (part of larger intention to unify the system and widening participation) – see p.376-8 for further description of the blurring of the divide between FE and HE.**Aim:** To explore students’ learner identity/ sense of themselves as ‘second chance learners’; to broadly evaluate a particular foundation degree**Theoretical frame:** Weick’s (1995) model of sensemaking, which is “retrospective, social and ongoing, and focused on and by extracted cues in our social environment” (p.385). Also Bourdieu: ‘General Theoretical Framework’ (from ‘Distinction’, 1984); specifically field, habitus; foundation degrees= sub-field of field of HE**Methodology:** ‘Exploratory study’; interpretive; interviews with students on FD program (n=6; convenience sample): 5f, 1m; 3 aged 31-40, 2 over 40, 1 under 30. Thematic coding.**Findings:** Number of themes1. ‘Second chance learners’: all participants had previous unsatisfactory experiences with education: “perceptions of under-achievement, limited opportunity and not realising their potential”, and they viewed their participation in the FD as “getting a second bite at the apple” (p.380). Students’ desire to return to education = ‘creative adaptation’ (see Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2010).
2. Motivation: flexibility to study part-time and balance work and study = ‘the practical option’, suggesting FD = “have a role to play in providing progression routes for those already within the workforce who wish to combine learning with their working lives” (p.382). Students also mentioned wanting to ‘prove to themselves that they could do it’
3. ‘Not quite higher education’: most students saw FE as a route to ‘getting a taste of’ HE; FD not seen as ‘threatening’ as a full degree program (possibly significant in terms of being ‘non-traditional’ students; see Bowl, 2001). Also, common perception that FE=better for their needs as mature students. Fear of failure seemed to fuel students’ belief that they needed more help. However, the location of study (in FE) could contribute to confusion about what an FD is (a ‘taste of HE’ rather than an academic qualification; significance = NVQs are privileged in the fields of health and social care)

**Relevance:** Exploring HE in FE offers insights into mature age students and their reasons for returning to study. “Educational disadvantage can be seen to be perpetuated in two ways: individuals excludethemselves from future possibilities by seeing themselves as not worthy of HE and institutions erect barriers to guard against students that are depicted as outside their realm of experience, or ‘other’” (p.387). |
| Heagney, M. & Benson, R. (2017). [How mature-age students succeed in higher education: implications for institutional support](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1360080X.2017.1300986), *Journal of Educational Policy and Management,* 39(3), 216–234.AUSAnnotation by Sally Baker | **Context:** Mature age students in Australian higher education; authors note the various names given: adult learners, second chance learners, financially independent learners, returners to study. Mature age students are thought to represent 40% of commencing students (citing Harvey et al., 2016). Authors present a potted history of mature age students/ development of equity policy and practice. They note an argument from 1998 to measure/ classify mature age low SES differently from young low SES students. Mature age students = more likely to be low SES (Levy & Burnheim, 2012), and more likely to experience ‘compound disadvantage’ (Harvey et al., 2016). National statistics = access rates of students aged 25+ grew from 15.66% of commencing domestic student population in 2007 to 17.10% in 2013 (similar growth in younger low SES population). Mature age/ LSES = more likely to study part-time, be less mobile, stay in home location, and be working. Achievement data suggest that mature age LSES students = succeeding at 97% of more affluent peers (see p.221)**Aim:** To “focus on the role of institutional support in the success of mature-age students, particularly given recent sectoral factors affect- ing their access and support” (abstract)**Methodology:** ‘Small, in-depth’ case study, drawn from larger longitudinal study of undergrad social work course/ progression. Authors draw on data from three interviews with mature age students (n=11; 10f, 1m)**Findings:** *Interview 1*: pathways into higher education. 9/11 participants identified how LSES had impacted on their schooling; 10 found gendered expectations/ sexual harassment impacted on school experiences. 8 were FiF; 7 were migrant background.*Interview 2*: concerns regarding finances/ paying for course and equipment (books etc.). Some students made adjustments to family budget; one had moved home with parents. Concerns regarding time: six had caring responsibilities; some participants described studying in terms of doing a second shift.*Succeeding*: participants = very high success rate and continued to achieve in post-degree careers.All participants mentioned family and friends being ‘paramount’ – assisting financially, emotional support, childcare/ housework.Peer support = also noted as importantAcademic support = participants were largely positive about the academic support they received, but limitations noted in terms of being a remote student/ off-campus and being unable to contact lecturers/tutors, not wanting to ‘be a pain’Feedback = regular and prompt feedback was noted as significantCurriculum design = online interaction ws noted as important (when a part of the curriculum); some students mentioned group work. Work-integrated learning = also considered to be a factor in success.Institutional support = the flexibility to swap mode (full to part time). Less positive comments about university support services, which were not readily accessed, and did not always offer what the students wanted (e.g. proof reading). Fee deferral also mentioned.Students generally overwhelmed by information/ material given at orientation.**Core argument:** Recommendations from Benson et al., 2013:“(1) facilitate peer interaction;(2) facilitate practical learning;(3) offer feedback and encouragement;(4) offer flexibility;(5) facilitate student-centred access to information and services” (cited on p.227). Information should be targeted at key times across the courseSupports should be embedded into the curriculum and students need to know about supports. Staff play an important role: “Staff have an important role to play in raising students’ awareness of practicum bursaries, government and institutions’ scholarships, emergency, travel and conference grants, as well as other financial services which universities provide” (p.231). Authors recommend the following strategies: workshops for staff, presentations by student supports, collaboration between faculties and support services, incorporation of regular training, regular updates from support services. |
| James, R.; Anderson, M.; Bexley, E.; Devlin, M.; Garnett, R.; Marginson, S.; & Maxwell, L. (2008). [*Participation and equity: review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people*](https://melbourne-cshe.unimelb.edu.au/research/past-research-projects/equity/participation-and-equity)*.* Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne. AUSAnnotation by Sally Baker | **Context:** The Australian Higher Education sector has experienced persistent underrepresentation in HE for various ‘equity target groups’. At the time this report was being prepared, the proportion of low SES students of all Australian students had showed no progress since the statistics started being collected in 1991.This report was prepared in 2008 for Universities Australia (peak body established in 2007 representing the university sector in Australia) by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne, an institution without a longstanding record in supporting students from underrepresented backgrounds. This study followed a Universities Australia funded report by the same Centre at Melbourne title Australian University Student Finances 2006 (Universities Australia 2007) which found that HE students were worse off in 2006 in financial terms than in 2000 when the previous study was undertaken.**Aim:** Report reviewed available literature relating to “participation and success of people from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds and Indigenous people in Australian higher education” (p.1). The authors explain that they are attempting to provide a clearer picture of participation in HE in Australia and an understanding of the factors that have led to areas of persistent underrepresentation for different groups in Australian society. The authors raise yet recoil from the question of “whether equity matters” (p.1) leaving the notion of ‘representation’ untested in terms of considering notions of parity of participation.**Findings:** 1). There are major limitations in terms of using indices based on the postcode of students’ home address to monitor participation in HE of people from low SES backgrounds and from rural and isolated areas;2). PGCW and areas of competitive entry are where you tend to find areas of underrepresentation for students from low SES backgrounds;3). “Social imbalances” in Australian higher education might not be as large as those in some developed nations, though direct comparison is difficult and the reasons are not well understood;4). Australian universities vary considerably in the proportion of students from low SES backgrounds due partly to geography and the effects of competitive selection based on school achievement;5). Low SES rural more underrepresented than low SES urban.**Relevance to PGCW/ equity:** The report finds the following that is in direct relation to PGCW: Students from low SES backgrounds comprise less than 10 per cent of postgraduate students Geographical measures of SES are even less appropriate for mature-age students and postgraduates Without an individual measure of SES that is sensitive to the circumstances of mature-age students it is not possible to draw confident conclusions about equity and access in postgraduate education**Points to future research agenda?**  The report makes it clear that study of the impact of low SES backgrounds and circumstances upon the educational achievements of mature-age students would be valuable.Report makes the following recommendation on page 9 - “Priority 3: Improve the level of Indigenous postgraduate enrolment, enhance Indigenous research and increase the number of Indigenous researchers.” -  |
| Kahu, E.; Stephens, C.; Leach, L. & Zepke, N. (2015). [Linking academic emotions and student engagement: mature-aged distance students’ transition to university](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0309877X.2014.895305), *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* 39(4), 481–497.NZAnnotation written by Sally BakerKeywords: *student engagement; academic emotions; transition; mature-aged; distance* | **Context:** Intersection between student experience and mature age students’ emotions in distance higher education with mature age (over 24) students. Scopes literature on emotions/ emotions and engagement (in learning)/ mature age students in NZ**Aim:** To explore relationships between academic emotions and student engagement**Theoretical frame:** Pekrun’s taxonomy of academic emotions and Kahu’s conceptual framework of student engagement**Methodology:** Mixed methods. Participants = first-year students (n=19) – mix of disciplines, all mature age, mix of modes. Data collection = interviews with participants and families (on preparation, motivations, expectations). Participants recorded weekly video diaries/ written diaries (n=2). Data = thematically analysed. Authors note difficulties of capturing participants’ emotions due to the many possible descriptors**Findings:** Data illustrate complex relations between academic emotions (separate from emotions relating to other aspects of their lifeworlds) and academic engagement. Data supports Christie et al. (2008) = ‘emotional rollercoaster’. Overall, “enjoyment and anxiety, were common, while others such as hopelessness and relief were rare” (p.486).*Emotional engagement* = interest and enjoyment (related to a sense of love for learning), which both “positively influenced both behavioural and cognitive engagement” (p.488). Interest triggered engagement (sustained) = resulting in more understanding/ harder work, which in turn triggers satisfaction*Emotional inhibitors*: boredom, frustration, worry. Boredom = triggered by difficulty of topic, lack of relevance and results in lowered cognitive engagement. Frustration = result of teaching practices/ university processes (especially poorly designed materials/ high workloads). Anxiety = peaks at different times of semester, connected with assignments and related to time management/ participating in tasks like discussion forums/ going on campus – related to student’s self-efficacy. Contact with other students = also provoked anxiety for some students. These emotions can both inhibit and prompt academic engagement.*Emotional outcomes*: pride/ disappointment, largely from grades/ achieving milestones (especially first grade) – but for one student, getting good first grade made her complacent for the next (authors remind us of subjective nature of emotional experiences; p.492)**Core argument:** |
| King, S., Luzeckyj, A., McCann, B. and Graham, C. (2015). [*Exploring the Experience of Being First in Family at University: A 2014 Student Equity in Higher Education Research Grants Project*](https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/exploring-the-experience-of-being-first-in-family-at-university/). National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Perth: Curtin University.AUSAnnotation by Sally Baker | **Context:** NCSEHE-funded research on the experience of FinF students, who are defined as “Students who are the first member of their immediate family, including siblings, to attend university” (p.8). FinF understood as disadvantaged because “their cultural and social capital does not readily align with that of the university” (p.8). Project focused on: * The factors that influence FiF students’ decisions to enrol, attend and continue at university, including their realisation of initial aspirations and ambitions.
* How FiF students experienced university, including the incumbent costs and related constraints of attending university, such as living costs, transport, housing, sacrifices made.
* The impact studying at university had on FiF students’ physical, social and mental health and wellbeing.
* How FiF students managed points of transition; e.g. how they managed their first few weeks at university or the transition to final years of study, including how they dealt with differences between their expectations and experiences, what support and help seeking strategies they implemented.
* In what ways their self-image or identity was transformed as a result of their attendance at university, including how these transformative experiences impacted upon their day-to-day lives as well as their impact on relationships with significant others (e.g. partners, children, parents, close friends).
* How universities supported or hindered their experiences and/or progress in terms of provision of particular kinds of learning spaces and places and access to teaching and support staff
* And finally, as these FiF students transitioned out of university, what they considered were the benefits of their university experiences and qualifications for themselves as individuals, for the university and society more broadly. (p.8).

**Theoretical frame:****Methodology:** Mixed methods. Narrative inquiry case study approach adopted. Literature review (155 international papers reviewed); survey data from 5300 students; in-depth interviews with 18 FinF students. Data collection conducted in UniSA, UAD, FLIND**Findings:** 4 key themes in literature review (offered in Appendix A): 1. The individual – emphasising individual/ personal characteristics of broad group
2. The student – adjustment to learner identity and practices
3. The journey – pathway into and through studies, particularly when combining work, family and study
4. The networks – importance of support networks (who and how)

Findings from survey and interviews**Demographics**:FiF = mostly school leavers; 15% = mature ageFiF = attend UniSA and Flinders more than Uni Adelaide, although UAD = highest number of FinF school leavers School leaver FinF = less likely to live with parents while studyingMost FinF attended public school, especially mature FinF (74.1%)30% of FinF attended rural high school, compared with 22% non-FinFFinF generally had lower ATARsMore FinF students enrolled in nursing, education, management & commerce, society & cultureMature FinF more likely to get information/ form expectations from friends and ‘cold’ forms of informationMature FinF expected to study for the most time Mature and school leaver FinF students more likely to attend classes if they perceived the teacher as enthusiastic* There is clear diversity in FinF student cohort, in terms of age and prior life experience – important to remember that when using reductive categories, such as ‘mature age’.
* The key motivating factor for FinF participation in higher education = for a better life and interest
* There are substantial financial and personal costs for FinF students in higher education, particularly for students who have to relocate to the city
* FinF students lack ‘hot knowledge’ that their non FinF peers have
* Cultural capital of FinF = not recognised = mismatch in habitus
* Transition = individual and difficult but = commonalities in terms of finding university an alien place and feeling a need to prove themselves as intelligent enough for university study (see significance of prior life/educational experiences)
* Data suggests that FinF = have realistic expectations
* Family and friends = important forms of support, and formal supports also utilised and valued
* Three core themes in benefits associated with higher education: personal growth; social experiences; and increased understanding of broader society (p.10)

**Recommendations**Institutions should:* systematically collect data on FinF students
* expand outreach into the community
* ensure that information given to students is explicit
* involve family members
* recognize and value FinF cohort
* provide more financial support to FinF students

Teaching and professional staff should:* Recognise that higher education is transformational for many FinF students
* Get to know your student cohort
* Build a sense of community on campus
* Make expectations clear
* Use accessible language
* Be approachable and enthusiastic in teaching
* Promote health and wellbeing
* Encourage students to seek help

**Core argument:** Further research needed on why FinF choose the courses they do and why FinF students drop out. FinF are “able to successfully navigate the complexities of higher education when provided with the appropriate support and opportunities” (p.78). |
| Luzeckyj, A., King, S., Scutter, S., & Brinkworth, R. (2011). [The significance of being first: A consideration of cultural capital in relation to “first in family” student’s choices of university and program. A Practice Report](https://fyhejournal.com/article/view/89/97.html), *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, 2(2), 91–96. AUS Annotation by Anna Xavier Keywords (Anna’s): *cultural capital; first-in-family; mature-age students; higher education*  | **Context:** Set within a research context supporting Martin Lohfink and Paulsen’s (2005) argument that the experience of participating in post-secondary education is “a particularly formidable task for first- generation students ... [as they do not have access to] the intergenerational benefits of information about college” (p. 409).**Aim:** To report on a study that explored ‘the differences between expectations of first-in-family (FinF) students and students who have immediate family members’ who have not attended university prior to them (p. 91). **Theoretical frame:** Cultural capital (Bordieu, 1991) – ‘related to cultural acquisitions and reflects the way in which knowledge, skills and qualifications are valued’ (p. 92), with an emphasis on ‘the ability to embody and reproduce culture as part of a personal style’ (p. 92). **Methodology:** Mixed-methods approach; Data collection methods: Surveys (with close- and open-ended questions); Document analysis – Australian University Alliance websites & Institutional Student Equity Performance Data 2007 (DEEWR, 2007); Participants: FinF students (first-year) (n=3091, 15% response rate) from three South Australian universities - University of Adelaide (UofA -52%), University of South Australia (UniSA -21%), Flinders University (Flinders -27%), all members of different alliances with the Australian university sector – UofA [Group of Eight], UniSA [Australian Technology Network], Flinders [Innovative Research Universities]; Sampling strategy: Self-identified participants; Data analysis: Survey data – SPSS v17 (descriptive data) & comparative analysis (using Chi-square/Anova), open-ended questions – thematic analysis, website data – explored using Bourdieu’s (1992) concepts of ‘game, field and capital’ (p. 94). **Findings:** 1)Factors influencing expectations of university: FinF students – heavy reliance on school counsellors & teachers, university recruiting materials & websites; Non FinF students – more reliance on parents, friends & siblings (parents: t=2.3, df=3,082, p<.01 d=.08; siblings: t=11.0, df=3,082, p<.001, d=.39; friends: t=3.3, df=3,082, p<.001, d=.11); 2)Decision to enrol in university – FinF students more likely to make decisions closer towards the end of high school or after gaining some work experience compared to non FinF students; 3)Geographical location – FinF students more likely to enrol from rural backgrounds (Chi-square=18.5, df=1, p<0.001, ǿ=.155), 48% of rural students identified in study were FinF to attend university; 4) Age – FinF student were ‘slightly older’ (22.06 years) (p. 94) than non FinF students (21.37) [however difference is minimal]; 5)University enrolment – FinF students were more likely to enroll in Flinders or UniSA than UofA (46% of FinF students in Flinders & UniSA, compared to 37% of students at UoA); 6)Subject enrolment – FinF students more often enrolled in education, economics & science, while non FinF students more frequently enrolled in law, medicine/dentistry & engineering. **Discussion:** From conference presentation – High level of interest on the impact of cultural capital on students’ university choices & selected degree programs; significant point of discussion: ‘FinF students do not lack cultural capital per se, rather they have a “different” cultural capital and that the onus should be on the university sector to change in order to recognise and value this cultural capital’ (p. 95). **Core argument:** FinF students offer ‘new forms of knowledge and ways of knowing that interact and challenge current dominant understandings & may provide us with opportunities to generate new ways of perceiving and understanding our physical and social world’ (Gale, 2011) (p. 95). The university sector should therefore develop an enhanced understanding of the capital FinF students bring, to ensure that university experiences facilitate the success of all students, including an expanding cohort of FinF students.  |
| Luzeckyj,A. McCann,B., Graham, C., King, S. & McCann, J. (2017). [Being First in Family: motivations and metaphors](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07294360.2017.1300138), *Higher Education Research & Development*, 36(6), 1237–1250.AUS Annotation by Anna Xavier Keywords: *First in Family; first generation; higher education; managing transition; metaphor; narrative motivations for attending university*  | **Context:** Despite being a growing cohort in the HE sector, FinF students remain an ‘under-recognised, equity grouping with a disproportionate number encompassing low-SES, mature-aged, regional and remote, and Indigenous students’ (p. 1238) (Bui, 2002; Engle, 2007; James, Krause, & Jennings, 2010). Authors highlight findings from their previous research (Luzeckyj et al., 2011) which showed that FinF students often experience educational disadvantage due to the misalignment of their cultural & social capital with that of the university. However, authors argue that despite shedding light on the expectations and experiences of FinF students’ university study through their previous research (Luzeckyj et al., 2011), there is limited knowledge on the ‘constraints FiF students face or what shapes their aspirations and ambitions to attend university, what factors impact on them most significantly whilst at university’ (p. 1237), as well as the impact of university life on their self-identity or their extended relationships with friends and family. **Aim:** To report on the interviews which explored FinF students’ understandings of their university experience, including motivations which influenced their commencement of study and factors which helped in sustaining their progress. The article focuses on students’ use of metaphors to describe their university experience. **Theoretical frame:** Conceptual framework – Metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980): Allow speakers ‘to open a door that cannot be opened by approaches that are too weighed down by duty to literal truth’ (Bakan, 1996, p. 7). **Methodology:** Qualitative approach; Data collection method: Semi-structured, in-depth interviews (6 interviews at each institution)– students were asked to identify a metaphor (or analogy) that described their university experience; Participants: FinF students from University of Adelaide, University of South Australia & Flinders University (n=18); various disciplines of study (Eg: Arts, Engineering, Speech Pathology, Graphic Design); Exclusion criteria: Students who had left university through attrition; Data analysis: **Findings:** 1) Three main themes & 8 sub-themes identified: Theme 1 – The student [sub-themes: individual characteristics & skills; consolidation of student identity; life at university); Theme 2 – The journey [sub-themes: motivators; enablers/barriers; choosing ‘what’ and ‘where’ to study]; Theme 3 – The networks [sub-themes: ‘who’; ‘how’] (p. 1240). Conceptual framework of themes, sub-themes and relationships between them: page5image173522)Metaphors utilised by participants of study: ‘linked to travel or a journey; illustrating unknowns; and illustrative of not belonging’ (p. 1242). All metaphors fit within the theme ‘student’, while aspects of motivation in the ‘journey’ theme and the aspects of ‘who’ and ‘how’ in the ‘networks’ theme were also evident in some responses, highlight interconnectedness of themes. A)Metaphors related to journey: Nina (35-year-old female, mother of six children) - ‘start here and you’ve got to get to there’; Rowan (31-year-old male) – ‘I think my university journey has been about, I would say it’s made me a more well-rounded adult’; Marg (43-year-old female) – variation of journey metaphor: climbing a mountain; Jen (26-year-old female) – variation of the journey metaphor that involved climbing – difficult but also ‘lovely’ (p. 1243); B) Metaphors illustrating unknowns: Carl (19-year-old male) – ocean metaphors (with a positive outlook – ‘you’re always heading towards your destination’); Travis (20-year-old male) – more dramatic & negative use of ocean metaphor (calmness of the ocean disguises potential danger); Gail (20-year-old female) – ‘University is like a surprise’; Alison (17-year-old female) – ‘like opening a can of worms’ (p. 1244); C) Metaphors about not belonging and adapting – Brendon (18-year-old male) – ‘fish out of water’ (showing a sense of not belonging & need to adapt); Todd – ‘popping bubble’ (to describe transition & learning experience); Roxie (33-year-old female) – diving board metaphor (reflects fears associated with getting started & needing a push, with changing roles between self & student); Carol (20-year-old female) – ‘roller coaster’ metaphor (indicates ups and downs experienced when renegotiating shift back to university life). **Discussion:** 1)Metaphors related to journey – The different descriptions of ‘journey’ provides some insight into students’ motivations – for Nina, the journey was about the ‘end point’, while for Rowan, it was about ‘personal development’ (p. 1243); Marg’s description of climbing a mountain emphasises an ‘uphill, long and hard’ time at university; 2)Metaphors illustrating unknowns – Carl’s positive outlook on his university experience as an ‘ocean’ with him always heading towards his destination reflects his resilience, while Travis’ negative connotation of the ocean as disguising potential danger through its calmness highlights the ‘culture shock’ experienced by students entering HE (Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell & McCune, 2008); Gail’s metaphor of ‘surprise’ and Alison’s metaphor of a ‘can of worms’ reflects their ‘confusion of being at university’, highlight the plight of FinF students who are often not sure of what to expect at university; 3)Metaphors about not belonging and adapting – Brendon’s metaphor of a ‘fish out of water’ reflects how the process of adapting to university is very difficult, especially for FinF students, who struggle to establish and assert their ‘student identity’ (p. 1245); Brendon’s metaphor also highlights the feelings of ‘social isolation’ and difficulty to fit in with the ‘clique’ experienced by FinF students. **Core argument:** The diversity of metaphors used by students ‘provide vivid depictions of students’ understandings of their lived experiences’, consequently offering ‘an avenue for the wider educational community to comprehend both the affective and cultural impacts that navigating the new environment of HE has on these students’ lives’. These insights into motivations and struggles could be considered by university staff and policy-makers when creating guiding strategies for future students’ (p. 1247). |
| Mallman, M. & Lee, H. (2016). [Stigmatised learners: mature-age students negotiating university culture](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01425692.2014.973017), *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* 37(5), 684–701. AUS Annotation by Anna Xavier Keywords: *learner identity; mature-age students; older learners; socially situated learning; university culture*  | **Context:** Although mature-age students are prioritised in HE research and policy due to the promotion of the concept of ‘life-long learning’ (p. 684), there is limited research on how ‘mature-age’ students experience the relational dynamics of university (p. 684). **Aim:** To examine mature-age students’ negotiation of ‘the process of becoming legitimate members of the learning community’ in HE, and ‘the resistance they face in doing so’ (abstract). Specifically, the article uses written accounts of both mature-age & school-leaver students to investigate how school-leavers may stigmatise mature-age students, due to contrasting priorities and academic practices. **Theoretical frame:** Social theory of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1998) - ‘people first learn as peripheral participants and move eventually toward a legitimate and full participation’ (p. 695). **Methodology:** Qualitative approach; Data collection method: Participant observation fieldwork (in different university settings) – students were asked to ‘observe, reflect on and write about elements of ‘university culture’ (p. 688), particularly student-student & student-staff interactions, cultural practices and reflections on what shaped their own ‘perspectives and experiences of university’ (p. 688); Students were also asked to write reflections comparing their experiences to those of students described in a US college account by Rebekah Nathan (2005, pp. 90 -106); Participants: First-year anthropology subject students at La Trobe University, Melbourne (n=344); 64.5% female & 33.7% male; 55% self-identified as Australian, although participants were from diverse ethnic backgrounds; age range – 18 to 56, students from ages 21 and above – 42.5% (considered mature-age by the university). **Findings:** 1)Anxieties about fitting into university culture - mature students are aware of the importance of the community’s role in their learning and have anxiety regarding their position in the university; written accounts of students indicate the ‘necessity of time to adapt to new routines, spaces and practices’; a majority of mature-age students showed concerns regarding sociality and the desire to establish social connection in the community, despite being more focused on their academics; belonging was shown to be a key concern; written accounts of students also indicate inadequate understandings and provision of support for older students, especially during their first-year transition; 2)’Normal’ student practice and stigma – school-leavers in HE have an ‘unwritten but widely shared mode of participation’, and mature-age students became aware of how their ‘enthusiasm for learning’, especially in their first year, broke tacit codes of conduct when school-leavers stigmatise their behaviour; the attachment of terms such as ‘annoying’ and ‘obnoxious’ to ‘mature-age’ (p. 693) students is prevalent in university culture, and mature-age students are aware of being marked as the ‘other’ in the classroom; 3)School-leavers’ views: endangering equality – ‘displays of enthusiasm’ was the primary concern of the ‘normals’ (p. 694) (school-leavers) in assessing the practices of mature-age students; school-leavers also displayed bafflement towards the perceived familiarity with instructors among older students; 4)Making judgments and re-evaluating practices – written reflections of students reflect the ‘disillusionment with university culture’ among mature-age students, which closely aligns with the disappointment of university staff regarding the lack of intellectual seriousness & engagement among some students; mature-age students ‘begin to see themselves as a type of university student – a mature-age student – which is a stigmatised identity from the perspective of younger students, but also indicates a level of academic maturity as defined by their instructors’ (p. 695); Mature students are often not interested in the social side of HE as much as school-leavers, for three reasons: i)they already have a social life, ii)they were focused on academic study, iii)they were already struggling to manage their current work-life balance. **Core argument:** In contrary to the perceptions of school-leavers, mature-age students face anxieties regarding ‘pressures external and internal to university life’ (p. 697), and it is evident that while school-leavers disapprove of the enthusiasm and active engagement of mature-students at university, mature-age students are ‘equally critical’ of school-leavers’ practices in HE. Findings from the study thus ‘confirm the importance of socially situated models of learning and indicate that HE research and education policy will benefit from further understanding the processes involved in adopting and inhabiting a ‘student’ identity, particularly as this is negotiated amongst other students’ (p. 697). |
| Mallman, M. & Lee, H. (2017). [Isolated learners: young mature-age students, university culture, and desire for academic sociality](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02601370.2017.1302012), *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 36(5), 512–525. AUS Annotation by Anna Xavier Keywords: *Young mature-age; higher education; university culture; learner identity; student support* | **Context:** Set within the context of an increasing number of mature-age students in HE institutions. However, the authors argue that despite extensive literature on the experiences of mature-age students in universities, ‘the differentiated experiences of young mature-age students’ (early 20s to early 30s) are often ‘under-researched and often unacknowledged in HE literature and university policy’ (abstract). **Aim:** To report on the experiences of young mature-age (YMA) students, the problems of isolation encountered amongst other students, and implications for these students’ identity development. **Theoretical frame:** Not specified in study. **Methodology:** Student-led ethnography; Data collection method: Students’ reflective written assignments on – observations of student-student or student-staff interactions, cultural practices, social spaces and reflections on their respective study-work-life balance; Participants: First-year anthropology students at La Trobe University, Melbourne (n=344) (part of cohort participating in research project on ‘University Culture’; 64.5% female & 33.7% male; 55% self-identified as Australian, although participants were from diverse ethnic backgrounds; age range – 18 to 56, students from ages 22 -33 (n=101/29.4%); Data analysis: Inductive and deductive approaches using the NVivo software. **Findings:** 1)Isolated learners: neither school leavers nor ‘mature age’ – Most YMA students felt like the ‘odd-one-out’ (p. 517), with difficulties relating to both school-leavers and mature-age students due to ‘perceived differences in maturity, specifically due to differences in life experience, interests, and age-related dispositions’ (p. 518); Differences in interest in sociality/friendships between mature-ages students and YMA students – absence of a social life/friendships was a source of anxiety and one of the greatest concerns for YMA students, while mature-age students in the study were no interested in his aspect of HE; 2)Barriers to social connection with school leavers – YMA students often felt like their experiences in life beyond formal education made them more ‘mature’ (p. 519) compared to their school-leaver peers, thus distancing them further from university; YMA students’ perception of social isolation from the dominant group of school-leavers is therefore a barrier to their full participation in HE; 3)Barriers to social connection with mature-age students – Although YMA students share a ‘perceived commonality of academic seriousness’ with older mature-age students, their contrasting desires for social integration and sociality distinguish YMA students from this cohort, therefore creating barriers for social integration between these demographics. **Core argument:** The expansion and complexification of student categories in HE is a crucial step in supporting older learners in HE, especially YMA students, who need ‘institutional fostering as a cohort’ (p. 523).  |
| McCune, V.; Hounsell, J.; Christie, H.; Cree, V. & Tett, L. (2010). [Mature and younger students’ reasons for making the transition from further education into higher education](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13562517.2010.507303), *Teaching in Higher Education,* 15(6), 691–702.UKAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: *higher education; further education; widening participation; transition; agency* | **Context:** Students moving from FE to elite university in Scotland (see Christie, 2009; Christie et al. 2008 etc.)**Aim:** To compare reasons for studying of younger and older students. Scopes literature on choice making/ reasons for study. To answer RQs:(1) What differences are there between the younger and older students’ scores on questionnaire items relating to their reasons for HE study?(2) What similarities and differences are there between the younger and older students’ interview accounts of their reasons for HE study?(3) Does the notion of ‘ learning trajectories’ provide an effective theoretical framework for making sense of the meanings the students attribute to their studies?**Theoretical frame:** Community of Practice (Lave and Wenger); Wenger’s perspectives on identity development as encompassing participants’ trajectories in relation to communities of practice.**Methodology:** Mixed methods: quant = standardised questionnaire (see Christie et al., 2016); qual = semi-structured interviews. Students split into 3 age groups: 17-20 (n=10), 21-30 (n=11) and 31 or older (n=24, all f): 82% = female. Oldest group = 21/24 studying vocational subjects (Social Work, Childhood Studies, Community Education and Primary Education). 79% = working class (Self-description). Statistics analysed with Spearman’s rank correlations**Findings:** All students = positive picture of motivations but mature students “seemed to have a particularly rich understanding of the meaning and relevance of their studies” (abstract)Majority students wanted to develop knowledge and skills, broaden horizons, and become more independent. Only youngest group interested in socializing/ sport.*Oldest group*: most likely to see HE as natural progression from FE and prove capabilities to themselves, study subject in depth = positive correlation. Students in oldest group talked about “relationship between their studies and their trajectories in relation to the communities of practice in which they had worked and in which they often planned to continue working once their studies were complete” (p.696) and HE = remove limitations of progression in career.*Middle group* = career is driving motivation but less already working in field of study so focus on career = more general than oldest group. More social reasons given compared with oldest group (e.g meeting new people) and personal development.*Youngest group*: career is important but less time to think through choices or relate choices to previous experience. Most likely to cite socializing as reason.**Core argument:** Reasons for studying are dependent / shift according to age of students. |
| McLellan, J.; Pettigrew, R. & Sperlinger, T. (2016). [Remaking the elite university: An experiment in widening participation in the UK](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1757743815624117), *Power & Education,* DOI: 10.1177/1757743815624117UKAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: *Widening participation, higher education, pedagogy, diversity, foundation year* | **Context:** Examines WP in elite universities in the UK; offers differing analysis (from idea that equity = ‘intractable problem’) whereby WP = viewed as aspect of pedagogy rather than administrative issue through case study of Foundation Year in Arts/ Humanities in Uni of Bristol. Authors refer to Russell Group statement, which blames underrepresentation of equity groups in high status unis/ disciplines on schools. Authors note that academics = also disenfranchised by increasing neoliberal pressures on HE. Foundation Year = “away into university for people without conventional educational qualifications” (p.4). Students = recruited via community engagement/ short courses/ local advertising. Foundation Year = informed by WP, by critical review of existing HE system, and by radical adult education tradition.WP = seen as administrative *process:* “Widening participation as process is also a consequence of the increasingly target driven culture in universities” (p.7). Gives example of OFFA access agreements (which deny/ reduce impact of unsanctioned/ compound disadvantage): “While this renewed focus on widening participation was welcome, in practice it encouraged universities to aim for ‘low-hanging fruit’, such as middle-class students who fulfil the ‘state-educated’ criteria” (p.7)**Aim:** Asks questions of elite universities in context of WP: “what is the role of an individual elite university, and of larger groups of such institutions? Do they have sufficient agency to widen participation or does the climate militate against creative attempts to diversify intake?” (p.2). Ultimately, it asks whether WP = ‘intractable’ or can elite universities be changed from within, and can a small-scale shift (Foundation Year) have broad ripple effect? (see p.6)**Theoretical frame:** Critical theory**Methodology:** Case study (no explicit discussion)**Findings:** When designing FY = designers wrote ‘pen portraits’ (imaginaries of particular kinds of excluded students) and used these fictional case studies to ask pre-emptive questions of the course. Also helped to mitigate interviewer bias: “The pen portraits forced us to focus on specific individuals who face specific obstacles to engaging with higher education, with consequences also for how they might realise other possibilities in their lives” (p.10).*Successes*: first cohort (n=27) was diverse (mature age, no A-levels, local). 89% completed the year and qualified for progression to undergraduate study and strong improvement in grades on written assignments.Qualitative data = suggests growth in confidence (see example of Rosie on p.11). 21/27 students in undergraduate studies when paper was written. Anecdotally, students were “acting as a magnet for other non-traditional students” (p.11). Furthermore, there were many positives for staff – not just course designers, but also other staff who taught into the course.Discussion of risks (p.13-15)Discussion of limitations: funding, small cohort numbers, course content = designed according to volunteer lecturers (it “tended to focus on Western interventions or legacies” despite efforts otherwise, p.15), arguably does not do enough to disrupt traditional teacher-student relationships**Core argument:** Resistance against creeping uniformity: “within a mass higher education system in which uniformity is increasingly emphasised (and necessary for administrative purposes), there is an urgent need for forms of pedagogy that resist and revitalise the dominant university culture” (p.6).WP as pedagogy “abandons the idea that it is some other part of the educational system that is responsible for low participation in the elite institutions – the schools, the applicants, or the families and social backgrounds of the applicants” (p.10).“[It is clear that] elite universities are clearly culpable for failing to admit a more representative group of students. It is clear that widening participation is not an ‘intractable’ problem: in fact, it is something that can be addressed quite readily with materials and expertise that universities have in abundance” (p.17). |
| Moreau, M.P. (2016). [Regulating the student body/ies: University policies and student parents](file:///Users/sallybaker/Dropbox/Equity%20Literature/Annotated%20bibliographies/Regulating%20the%20student%20body/ies%3A%20University%20policies%20and%20student%20parents), *British Educational Research Journal,* 42(5), 906–925.UKAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: *England; higher education; student parents; widening participation* | **Context:** Examines the policy context of student-parents in English HE. Set in context of diversified academy that remains beholden to patriarchal, hegemonic policies and practices that privilege the experience of ‘traditional’ students – discussion of historic exclusion of women from education; Westernised masculine rational thought (denial of embodied, affective knowledges). Moreau offers a critique of the impacts of neoliberal/ entrepreneurial university on student-parents (see p.911). Offers analogy of parenting as ‘greedy institution’ (see Moreau & Kerner, 2015 for the same argument about universities): “Both appear to be time rather than task-driven and always leave room for bettering one’s own (academic and parenting) work” (p.911). Parenting = characterised as ‘private matter’ (increased parent choice; increased scrutiny of parents) **Aim:** To explore “the role of university policies in compounding the experiences of student parents – a group which remains under-researched” (p.908); examining whether university policies ‘normalise’ the care-free student.**Theoretical frame:** Feminist theory (Crompton, 1999) -intersectionality; three-part levels of care: care orders (macro), care regime (meso), care practices (micro); sociology of (higher) education/ widening participation**Methodology:** Data in paper gathered in Nuffield Foundation-funded project on student parents in HE (fieldwork in 10 different English universities) = desktop audit, interviews with staff and student-parents, demographic questionnaire for students. Policy = macro-institutional level; “institutional and national policies are conceptualised as creating a terrain allowing particular scripts to emerge” (p.909).**Findings:** Dissociation of care in HE = evident in what’s not visible – lack of representation of student-parents and children on campus. Dominant characterisations of students = carefree, young and careless. Overlap between student parents and mature students = partial, and not immediately visible in imagery or policy, which also plays out in awareness of student-parent friendly policies and services (from interview data with staff). Parental status = often disclosed at point of crisis – meaning the likely label of ‘problem student’ = ascribed.*Analysis of institutional policies*Children’s access to HE = varied significantly (offers examples of where children = not permitted into libraries; see p.914)Three different approaches identified in 10 universities: 1. Universal/ ‘careblind’: 2/10 universities had no policy or provision for student=parents; reference to children = prohibit their presence
2. ‘Targeted’: 5/10 universities had ‘some specific provision’; reference made mostly in context of nursery and financial/ means-tested grant
3. ‘Mainstreaming’: 3/10 universities attempted to mainstream; extensive references to student parents (child care, children allowed on campus, spaces for student parents

Moreau notes limitation of design (aka case study universities = not likely to be representative of whole sector)Results of analysis of policyscape – seemingly ‘neutral’ policies can (further) marginalise student parents: “As generic policies are usually designed with the childfree student in mind, their negative effects on parents, including at academic, financial, social, health and emotional levels, risk being overlooked” (p.916). Spatial-temporal domain = significant barrier despite being ‘fair’ or ‘neutral’ (e.g., timetabling and unsuitable spaces for breast feeding). Issues persist at level of cost (e.g., for childcare/ lack of financial support), leading to students being viewed as deficient, needy, special. For ‘mainstreaming’ to be successful, it needs to be well-resourced and systematically implemented**Core argument:** The hegemonic shape of HE = masculine and care-free: “By rendering carers, children and pregnant bodies invisible in academia, media, national policy and university ‘texts’ regulate (the) student body/ies and normalize the association of the ‘bachelor boy’ with HE” (p.913). |
| Moreau, M.P. & Kerner, C. (2015). [Care in academia: an exploration of student parents’ experiences](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01425692.2013.814533), *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 36(2), 215–233.UKAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: *care; higher education; student parents; mothers; England* | **Context:** Set in context of WP in England (post-New Labour policies) + rhetoric of social mobility and fairness. Focus on student parents/ people with caring responsibilities. Cites data from Student Income and Expenditure Survey (2009): 8% f/t and 36% p/t students = parents (see p.218). Invisibility of care in HE = systemic/ institutional level – universities = ‘greedy institutions’**Aim:** “to shed light on the experiences of student parents, with a view to contribute to the theorisation of the relationship between care and HE” and to “discuss the relative invisibility of student parents in the policy and physical spaces of HE” (p.216). **Theoretical frame:** Draws on social constructivist/ feminist theories; discourse (Foucault) **Methodology:** Qualitative: 10 x case study English universities (funded by Nuffield Foundation) – 6 unis = pre-1992, 4 = post-1992; audit of university websites = great variability in provision for parents. Interviews with staff (n=20) and with students with at least one child under 11 (n=40 – half = UG; 29/40 = f/t; average age = 35; 9= single parents; 12 = international students; 1/3 had children under 5; 2 = male)**Findings:** Problematises the conflation of student parents and mature students (not all mature students = parents and vice versa). 9/10 universities do not collect information on student parents. Analysis of institutional imagery (Leathwood and Read, 2009) = dominantly depicts students as “young, smiling and (presumably) ‘unencumbered’ women” (p.219).*Time-related difficulties for student-parents*: many = ‘time-poor’ and talked of ‘balancing act’, “through which they aimed to dedicate enough time to the needs of their family, to their studies and to the other activitiesand people that matter in their lives” (p.219). Example of ‘Katherine’ – ‘you can never win’ = juggling responsibilities/duties, but does not internalize as issue at individual/organizational level. Discussion of parenting and what counts as motherhood: p.220 – makes comparison between parenting and academic ‘bottomless’ work: “Expectations in terms of mobility and availability risk conflicting with parental commitments” (p.220). Strategies developed by parents to balance study and parenting discussed on p.221. Describes ‘family unfriendly’ institutional practices, such as giving timetables very late (authors also note that many student parents also work). Discussion of domestic work/ care at home (p.222) and lack of ‘me time’Financial difficulties for student-parents: exacerbated by lack of support for childcare costs in addition to other financial pressures (see work on risk for working class students: e.g., Archer, Hutchings and Ross, 2003). Some students considered themselves better off as a student (e.g. single parents; see p.225).Health/ emotional impacts: mixed feelings (guilt, depression, sleep deprivation, feelings of ‘missing out’ or ‘not fitting in’). Children often driving force to enter/ remain at university (role models) = see p.227; “Being a student is then articulated as a way of being a ‘better’ parent in the longer term, even though it implies compromisingthe ideal of the ‘good’ mother in the shorter term” (p.228).**Core argument:** Student parents = largely invisible in the academy. This paper adds further rich description to the experiences of ‘non-traditional’ students, and describes struggles of a group “characterised by some intense organisational and moral work as they try to reconcile the demands of being a parent and a student” (p.229). Has major gender implications. HE = site of struggle and resistance for these students. |
| O’Shea, S. (2013). [Transitions and turning points: exploring how first-in-family female students story their transition to university and student identity formation](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09518398.2013.771226), *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 1–24.   AUSAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: *transition to university; first-in-family students; mature-age students* | **Context:** Transition into higher education study for female, mature age and first in family students, who are described as defining themselves as ‘imposters’ in O’Donnell & Tobbell’s (2007) study. Scopes gender divide in HE and scopes literature on women returners. Also navigates literature on identity/ies in HE (p.137-8). Transition = risky (see p.138). Social class also important frame **Aim:** To offer insight into women’s perceptions of their social world of the university and negotiations with the university; how the participants managed their transitions and their identity positions**Theoretical frame:** Learning identity (Johnston & Merrill, 2009) = complex/ contradictory (intersectional): “Learning identities may have been forged in previous educational environments and so entry into higher education may either confirm them or disrupt them, prompting a renegotiation” (p.138); ‘turning points’ (see Cappeliez, Beaupre, and Robitaille, 2008) and ‘becoming’**Methodology:** Narrative inquiry/ repeat interviews with mature age, female and FinF students (n=17). Ontology = symbolic interactionism. Longitudinal nature (one year) allowed O’Shea to “journey with the participants in order to explore the various critical stages encountered as they themselves were experiencing them” (p.141). Age range of participants = 18-47 (average age = 32). 9/17 had finished HSC; 10/17 had completed some form of post-school education (VET/ Access to gain access). 4/17 completed STAT test. Iterative process of analysis, a “circuitous process” (p.144)**Findings:** Three themes: Coming to university, Persisting in the university environment, Changes in thinking*Coming to university*: Decision to enrol at university = major, often with resistance from family members. Only 2/17 had experienced joy and excitement from partner. Turning points = varied between women but marked a point where university became a possibility/ necessity (e.g., an escape from dysfunction, possibility of getting more out of life, fulfilment, shift away from domestic space). Compromise =needed to manage dynamics with family.Initial interactions with university = complicated and intimidating (p.148). Persistence = characterised as series of turning points.P*ersisting in the university environment*: reflecting on ‘highs’ and ‘lows’, assessment featured prominently/ = significant turning points. At the beginning of Year 1, the idea of failing an assignment was the biggest fear (15/17 students); “This was related to both the financial implications of failure but also the personal and public repercussions such as diminished self-confidence as well as disappointment from self and others” (p.149).Perception of transition = relational to prior educational experiences and perceptions of learning selves and knowledge of university and culture (‘culture shock’, p.150)Changes in thinking: dramatic turning points in participants’ relational lives (including relationships at home). Their reasons for studying changed over the course of the year, “even those women who had initially described university in more instrumental terms talked more about self-fulfilment and changes in identity by the end of the year” (p.152)**Core argument:** Turning points = useful way of exploring students’ transitions in identities through process of entering and studying in Year 1 of university (relational, confidence as learner, confidence in self more generally): “University and the related turning points in self-identity also led some of the women to question the taken-for-granted aspects of their lives” (p.153) |
| O’Shea, S. (2015). Filling up silences — first in family students, capital and university talk in the home, *International Journal of Lifelong Education,* 34(2), 139–155.AUSAnnotation written by Sally BakerKeywords: *higher education participation; cultural and social capitals; intergenerational educational mobility; first in family students* | **Context:**  Impact on household/ home for older students in higher education**Aim:** To “explore how their participation in the higher education environment led to conversations in the family around learning” (abstract)**Theoretical frame:** Bourdieu: capital**Methodology:** Draws on FiF research (see O’Shea 2016 for description); this article presents two narrative (co-constructed) accounts: Nigel and Ann**Findings:** *Nigel***:** 26 yearold, single, lives at home, worked in retail since age 18, entered on basis of high school qualifications. Says he was too immature to consider higher education after leaving school. University not discussed at home—assumption was that kids would start working after school. Nigel reports that despite being ambivalent at first, mum now used Nigel as a model for younger brother to consider uni.Ann: 36 years old, married, two children (age 17 and 13), entered via vocational pathway. Returned to studying to get a better job— did TAFE courses to see what she was interested in. Didn’t consider university after school; had baby at 19; had never been on uni campus before orientation day. No conversation about university at home. Receives support from family to help her study.Main themesBetterment, despite clear ideas before that university was not for themDiscussions of cultural capital: for Nigel = shift in status in family (role model for younger sibling); for Ann =emotional support and encouragement of family. Both = “actively ‘bridging’ between the home place and university” (p.152) for others in their families, “Both take on the role of cultural change agent within the household, actively creating the space for alternative perspectives on educational participation” (p.152).However, returning to education = required shift and work to move between university habitus and home/ family habitus**Core argument:** “Rather than university outreach and support initiatives focusing solely on individual learners, these two stories point to the value of a more holistic approach that includes the family unit” (p.152–3). |
| O’Shea, S. (2015). ["I generally say I am a mum first . . . but I'm studying at uni": The narratives of first-in-family, female caregivers transitioning into an Australian university](https://ro.uow.edu.au/sspapers/2015/), *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 8(4), 243–257. AUSKeywords: *First-in-family students; Student caregivers; narrative vignettes; collective stories; gender roles*  | **Context:** Experiences of mature students (female caregivers/ older women) who have had a break from studying in Australian higher education. Focus of this article = interaction between gender, caregiving and learning/transition. **Aims:** To “examine how this group of women transitioned into the university environment with specific reference to their student and caregiving identities” (p.243–4) **Theoretical frame:** Feminist perspective**Methodology:** Draws on two research studies (2007 and 2013), using semi-structured interviews. Narrative inquiry; collective vignettes: “This was a deliberate choice to acknowledge the unique biographies of these women while simultaneously identifying the commonalities of experience” (p.247). Author’s own biography and positioning = important to this (see p.247). Analysis = constructivist grounded theory.**Findings:** Collective vignettes of female caregivers*Vignette 1 — Returning university*: generally informed by personal ambitions and perspectives of others; example of Rose (married, 2 kids) = foregrounds a sense of waiting for ‘her time’. For others = striving for economic security, but also concern in data about financial investment/ creating financial disadvantage for children through studying. Many women expressed feelings of guilt and imposter syndrome. Overall, author writes that there “is a sense of fragility in some of these women’s stories, the decision to come to university has had deeply felt repercussions” (p.251) — fear of judgement from others, fear of losing support. Some students (e.g. Nicki, recently separated single mum) was keeping her studies a secret. Other participants described having to ‘prove themselves fit’ to balance study and work/parent. This also created strain in the participants’ relationships: “This stratification [of gender roles] limited personal horizons and marked this decision to attend university as not only different to deeply embedded gender norms but also, a possible threat to expected life course” (p.251). *Vignette 2 — managing movement between home and university*: each participant described strategies they had developed to manage competing demands on their time/ expectations of them, such as demarcating time and space for different parts of their lives (study, family, work) etc. to maximise time/ enable productivity. “This is a difficult “balancing act” that has high emotional stakes as the women de- scribe their attempts to limit the impact on family” (p.252) and managing boundaries was reported as difficult. Attending university required sacrifice, with many participants perceiving their children as missing out. All of this prompted emotional responses/ burden.Author argues = “sense of fragility” in the stories, with “deeply felt repercussions” (p.251)Vignettes depict ‘non-normative transitions’ **Core argument:** Gender roles are significant and can result in feelings of guilt about not doing their best for their children/ families + study + work etc. Author notes Acker’s (1992) work on ‘gendered institutions’ for considering the tacit barriers that mature women/ caregivers face in seeking to enter and participate in higher education (contrasted against imagined ‘ideal student’ = mobile, middle class, responsibility-free).“There is a clear need to problematize the gendered nature of both care and learning to avoid assumptions that failure to successfully transition to higher education is attributable to personal reasons rather than linked to structures beyond the control of the individual” (p.254). Universities need to expand their conceptions of/ assumptions about who our students are and what they bring with them.Universities should do more to find out about the experiences of their caregiving students. |
| O’Shea, S. (2016). [Navigating the knowledge sets of older learners: Exploring the capitals of first-in-family mature age students](https://scholars.uow.edu.au/display/publication112894), *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning,* 18(3), 34–54.AUSAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: *Mature aged learners, cultural capitals, higher education, widening participation* | **Context:** First in family students in Australian higher education; high percentage of Australian commencing students = mature age (40%, citing ABS data from 2012). First in family = reported to be more than half (51%, citing Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013). Literature review = financial risks for mature age students, relational risks, identity risks.**Aim:** To “explore how attending university impacted upon both the learners and their families, particularly the intergenerational implications of this attendance” (abstract); “to understand how participants conceptualise themselves as successful learners and what assisted in the enactment of this success” (p.35); to respond to these RQs:“(1) What knowledges and skills did students reflect upon as assisting them in their transition to university? and (2) In what ways did existing social and cultural constructs translate into and interact with the university environment?” (p.35–6)**Theoretical frame:** Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Framework**Methodology:** In-depth interviews with FiF students (n=26) over two years (2013–2015). Half = 18–25 years old; 13 = 25+, from a variety of discipline areas. Median age = 37; most of 26 FiF were women; 18 were parents and 9 were single parents. Method = open-ended narrative interviews: students = reflected ‘deeply’ on motivations for uni, how they were successful **Findings:** *Aspirational capital*: all participants suggested that attending university was a long-held ambition. Students talked about this desire in terms of developing self-sufficiency, undertaken solo (not much direction), despite family influences.*Social capital****:*** reactions among students’ social circle = mixed (some fear and resentment, some confusion). Other participants described the myriad supports offered (childcare, cooking, financial support).*Familial capital:*many participants described family/ friends’ influence on decision to start/ continue with studies, including doing so for children and /or parents.Silences in Yosso’s framework: experiential capital —" knowledge sets that had been derived from life and professional experiences” (p.46) =.a “depth of understanding that could be applied to their learning” (p.46). Also enhanced their self-awareness and criticality, linked to their motivations for returning to education.**Core argument:**Mature age students need targeted transition supports and outreach programsLearners need to be understood in holistic ways, which could include “an initial assignment item that aims to encourage reflection on the part of the learner in relation to these existing strengths or life experiences” (p.48)Universities need to consider range of capitals, and “need to revise our understandings and assumptions about this student. |
| O’Shea, S.; Stone, C.; Delahunty, J. & May, J. (2018). Discourses of betterment and opportunity: exploring the privileging of university attendance for first-in-family learners, *Studies in Higher Education,* 43(6), 1020–1033.AUSAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: *First-in-family learners; university access and participation; qualitative research; cultural capitals; educational equity* | **Context:** First in family mature age students in Australian higher education. Addresses the deficit framing of ‘non-traditional’ students by problematising the concept of privilege in the context of the benefits of attending university. Benefits are often couched in economic/ financial terms and this is reflected in rise of marketing in the sector. Scopes literature on FinF students (from ‘financially poorer backgrounds’, p.2) – debt averse and unequal access to financial resources/ support; Australian context, preoccupation with living costs and transport, while in UK focus is more on tuition fees. Reviews literature on economic status and poverty/ higher education Offers definition of FinF as “those individuals who are the first in their immediate family, including parents, partners, children and siblings, to attend university” (p.3).**Aim:** [of overarching project]= to examine “the impact on the family and household when one of their own is the first to enter university studies and begins to build a student identity” (p.5); to explore transitions of FinF into higher education/ translations of this at family and community level.**Theoretical frame:****Methodology:** Qualitative/ mixed methods. Funded by OLT. Data collection = in-depth interviews and open-ended survey questions. Participants recruited from 3 cohorts: 1) enabling education, 2) undergraduate students studying face-to-face, 3) undergraduate students studying wholly online from a range of universities. Participants recruited via email. Interviews with 92 students (phone/ face-to-face); online survey (n=173). Additional interviews conducted with family members (n=4) and family members completed a survey (n=40). Questions for both interviews and survey had 4 broad themes: (1) university experience; (2) family/friends reactions; (3) family perceptions of university; and (4) student experience (see p.5). Paper focuses on interview data. Analysis = thematic and influenced by narrative research (focus on stories and comparison across cohort). Propose intersectional understanding of FinF (other variables = impactful such as gender, ethnicity and age). Focuses on younger group (18-25; n=35), none of whom had children, mostly studying full time and still living at home, most self-identified as white (no Indigenous participants in this group). Majority had completed HSC (28/35); most were female (21/35) and most in first year (19/35).**Findings:** Three major themes: Discourses of betterment and opportunity; Realising generational dreams and ambitions; Disparities between expectations and realities*Discourses of betterment and opportunity:* Participants mostly spoke about university as a chance to improve future opportunities (with positionality against parents’ lives, aka a rejection of – see example of Abbey on p.7); idea that university = ticket to ‘good jobs’ also prevalent in the data.*Realising generational dreams and ambitions*: Some of this is related to the vicarious wishes of parents and family members who ‘missed out’ on opportunities. The emotional burden of this bequeathing of opportunity = ‘burdensome’Disparities between expectations and realities: sources of information for FinF = ad-hoc and ill-informed. Students also largely underprepared for financial and academic/ time implications of study, which resulted in unexpected levels of stress (leading some to take leave from studies or drop units).**Core argument:** Expectations of FinF students need to be better understood: high opportunity factor, but mismatch between expectations and reality = stressful: “For some, the duality of the student role combined with the family pressure to achieve and succeed in life can result in significant stress” (p.10). Furthermore, the kinds of opportunities are largely understood in terms of future economic gain, which does not necessarily play out in reality: “[The] discourses [of betterment and opportunity] often focus narrowly on the ability to acquire financialcapital through successful tertiary study, failing to explicitly recognise and acknowledge other empowering types of social and cultural capital which higher education can confer. There is a need to recognise these other, more experiential transformations that the university experience can engender, instead of solely emphasising the financial benefits that may be acquired upon completion” (p.11). |
| Pearce, N. (2017). [Exploring the learning experiences of older mature undergraduate students](https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/openu/jwpll/2017/00000019/00000001/art00004;jsessionid=g4nc2g9hlis6q.x-ic-live-01), *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning,* 19(1), 59–76.UKAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: *Mature student, older mature student, lifelong learning*  | **Context:** Older mature age students (over 40 years old) in UK higher education; author argues that the label ‘mature age’ conceals a lot of diversity. Author starts from premise that older students get better outcomes than younger students. Author notes how many mature age students come from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, so the increase in mature age participation has been heralded as success for social mobility.**Aims:** To discuss the experiences of older mature age students in higher education, and to outline the implications of examining experience for institutions**Methodology:** Qualitative study; research with sub-set of older mature age students (n=6; 3f, 3m) recruited from Foundation Studies [enabling program]. Author notes that by researching with his own students, he had to address three ethical concerns (informant bias, existing familiarity between participants, interview reciprocity). Students all transitioned in Social Sciences undergraduate degrees.**Findings:** Several themes emerged: confidence, time management, difficulty in socialising, use of technology,*Confidence* (or lack of) = significant because attending the Foundation Studies course was deliberate strategy to build confidence; issues with confidence arose at particular times — especially assessment time.*Time management*: relating to commuting, time spent on studies, family and work pressures.*Social difficulties*: all participants reported differing levels of difficulty in socialising, although some of their isolation was self-imposed. Students didn’t socialise outside of university, but some reported having coffee together. All participants reported a turning point where they had to socialise and this shifted/ opened up opportunities to socialise.*Use of technology*: students mentioned challenges with adapting to technology, preferring to handwrite at the beginning**Core argument:** Older mature age students can find it difficult to engage with younger students; confidence can be an issue. |
| Pearce, J. & Down, B. (2011). [Relational pedagogy for student engagement and success at university](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13384-011-0037-5), *The Australian Educational Researcher,* 38(4), 483–494.AUSAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: *Higher education, Disadvantage, Pedagogy, Social inclusion, Student engagement* | **Context:** Focus on low SES students in context of increasing participation targets (post-Bradley) and in regional setting (Murdoch University). Findings foreground importance of student-staff relationships: positive relationships = sustain engagement; negative relationships = work against WP agenda. Set against context of under-representation of equity groups. Argue that to create a participatory and empowering educational context, need to understand students’ social histories, particularly in context of metanarratives/ ‘schooled knowledges’ (Alexander et al., 2005) that dictate who should have access to university – based on well-rehearsed scripts (“‘competition’, ‘failure’ and ‘sorting’”, p.485). **Aim:** To explore the “cultural and pedagogical conditions that promote, support and enable their continuing participation and engagement in higher education” of low SES students in a regional university**Theoretical frame:****Methodology:** Qualitative: ‘purposeful conversations’ with 16 low SES UG students. All participants in study = came from enabling pathways and were mature aged (21-45), most = FinF. All participants = in 2nd/ 3rd year**Findings:** Relational pedagogy = important for enhancing student learning; it foregrounds the importance of relationship building. Findings arranged around support & resources/ constraints & interferences*Support & Resources*Interaction (in lectures, tutorials, informal interactions) = key for developing rapport and permitting a sense that academics are available to students (helps students to feel supported, to stay on track. Navigating who is approachable = important part of transitioning. Participants found that not all academics are open to interaction and “academics’ wishes are difficult to interpret and often contradictory” (p.486), which is likely to be result of poor communication. Participants’ descriptions = highlight importance of clear communication = ‘participatory model of communication’ = best (dialogue, horizontal relationship - Freire) + funds of knowledge. Interaction with lecturers = prevents sense of alienation. Notes power of academics (‘relational trust’ = Bryk & Schneider, 2002; or ‘relational trust’ =Warren, 2005)*Constraints & interferences*Relational pedagogy = shaped by institutional norms = impact on academic work and possibilities for relationships to develop. Mention casualization of workforce: “working conditions minimise opportunities for engagement with students” (p.488). Curriculum design = important for creating moments of connection: “When the emphasis is on delivering a large amount of content in a lecture setting, there is less opportunity for student interaction” (p.488) = “absence of dialogic encounters with students” (p.488). Participants described feeling dismissed and unimportant. Importance of feedback foregrounded (as in lecturers don’t want to give it) – onus = on students to seek feedback. Some academics = ‘stand-offish’ = critique of banking model.Authors briefly note context of neoliberal logics = “Relational dimensions of pedagogy are being seriously eroded and diminished by the anti-democratic and authoritarian tendencies of neoliberalism” (p.491)**Core argument:** Relational pedagogy (relations and connections between staff and students) = particularly important for students who may experience cultural and economic issues (e.g. child care, balancing work and family, not knowing the ropes) and for students who have previously felt marginalised or isolated in their educational experiences. Feedback is particularly important. “When academics do not recognise the potentially exclusionary impact of their pedagogies and thus fail to engage in a relationship that can provide support when it is needed, they may unconsciously perpetuate existing social inequalities” (p.492). |
| Reay, D.; Crozier, G. & Clayton, J. (2010). [‘Fitting in’ or ‘standing out’: working-class students in UK higher education](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01411920902878925), *British Educational Research Journal,* 36(1), 107–124.UKAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords (Sally’s): *learner identity, self-perception, working-class, institutional habitus* | **Context:** Looks at working-class participation in UK higher education (approx. 25%) in context of concerns about WP and student retention/ attrition – high drop out with high levels of WP and polarisation of institutions according to WP/ class (16% of RG enrolments = 3 lowest social classes) – only 1% of less affluent submissions = accepted by top 13 universities (Sutton Trust, 2007). Key focus of ESRC-funded research reported = social class as marker of identity (also gender and ethnicity intersect). See Crozier et al., 2008 for other report on same project.**Aim:** Research study conducted to: “find out whether these students strive to change and conform to the institutional milieu or to reproduce their identities in an act of resistance, or whether they merely seek validation for who they are; to discern to what extent they fit in or stand out” (p.110)**Theoretical frame:** Bourdieu: institutional habitus (described as “a dynamic concept, a rich interlacing of past and present, individual and collective”, p.108) – academic status of university = important part of its habitus (and ‘expressive order’ = cultural capital – see Reay et al., 2005) and field.**Methodology:** Analytic category of class based on national statistics (social economic classifications) and parents’ educational profiles/ first in family. Research = mixed methods in 4 universities (elite = Southern, civic = Midland, FE college = Eastern, and post-1992 = Northern). Looked at limited range of subjects (see p.110). Questionnaire distributed to Year 1 & 2 students for collecting demographic data (n=1209). Used survey data to identify working-class students for follow up case studies. 27 students followed over a year (over 2 academic years) and interviewed students at ‘key decision-making moments’. In total, 97 face-to-face interviews conducted – focusing on perceptions of self and changes over time. Observations of lectures and seminars also conducted “in order to gain a better understanding of both institutional habitus and the students’ learning dispositions” (p.110)**Findings:** Working class students = patterns and differences across 27 students according to factors such as mature student, different academic levels, poor financial circumstances, career ideas.Institutional habitus – the 4 HEIs = very different. Largest % of working-class students in Northern, although FE college doesn’t record these statistics (but 50% of questionnaire respondents at Eastern= working class). All 4 “have identifiable institutional habituses in which their organisational culture and ethos is linked to wider socio-economic and educational cultures through processes in which universities and the different student constituencies they recruit mutually shape and reshape each other” (p.111).* *Eastern* = students lack access to normal uni resources, although they can share with local uni but many students do not because of time/ location. Nearly all students live at home, with that being a key driver for choosing Eastern.
* *Northern* = economically deprived urban area – students either live at home or off-campus; nearly all work part-time. Academics perceive most students as working class but statistics suggest = 40%. Lectures = not compulsory and no formal tutor time. Many students = low levels of commitment.
* “At both Eastern and Northern the congruence between individual and institutional habitus often lulls working-class students into a sense of security and symmetry, providing a comfort zone where the working-class students feel they are accepted” (p.112)
* *Midland* = very different from Eastern and Northern. Most students live in halls, it has more resources, less than half work part-time. Better sense of students intergrated into university life; students “described a wide spectrum of learners ranging from the hardworking and committed to those operating in more instrumental ways” (p.113), particularly related to first year assignments not counting to overall degree classification. 47% live on campus
* *Southern* = [Oxbridge??] “intensive, highly academic teaching and learning supported by regular one-to-one or one-to-two supervisions and tutorials where the expectation is that students make substantial contributions and are challenged and questioned by both their peers and teachers” (p.113) – all students considered ‘studious’ (contrast to range of subjectivities in Midland). 82% live on campus

Influence on students: strongest impact = where students live (at home/ on campus). Intellectual challenge rated differently (77% = high at Southern; 27% = high at Northern); similar wide disparity in perceptions of academic support, particularly with regard to one-to-one support. Students at Northern perceived themselves as having to be more independent/ rely on themselves. Sense of selves as students diverse too; in Northern and Easter = partial student identity (likely result of other responsibilities in life such as work or family). In contrast, Southern and Midland = strong sense of self as academic learner.Relationship between class and identity = spectrum of experience of being university student – Eastern and Northern at one end, Southern at the other. Eastern students largely consider themselves to be ‘college students’; at Northern, students = perceive selves as university students but also local and working class; at Southern (and Midland but not as much) = self as university student is much more common. Discussion of how some disconnections/ jostling between home/ parents and attending university (especially Southern and Midland students).Fitting in? Working class student = not cool to be clever: “we see the power of institutional habitus in the form of a student learning culture defined by ‘laid-back’ attitudes and a casual, last-minute approach to academic work. Kylie mentions her desire to fit in with her student peers three times and it is obvious that she feels her enthusiasm for learning needs to be tempered, at least in front of other Northern students” (p.117). Same student = applying to RG uni to do PG study where she thinks she will ‘fit in academically but not socially’ (opposite of UG study at Northern) = standing out/ fitting in.**Core argument:** “The rewards and recognition of being a university student are powerfully differentiated across the higher education field” (p.120). “The crucial difference between students at the four institutions lies more in the learner identities that they bring to the higher education context than in differing identifications and social identities” (p.117). Working-class = heterogenous  |
| Saddler, Y. & Sundin, E. (2020). Mature students’ journey into higher education in the UK: an interpretative phenomenological analysis, *Higher Education Research & Development*, 39(2), 332–345. UKAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: *Mature students; higher education; personal and social changes; goals; motivations; identity change* | **Context:** Widening participation in UK higher education. Factors that help and hinder mature students to access and succeed in higher education.**Aims:** To “examine factors that a small group of mature students perceived influenced them as they made the decision to take up HE” (abstract, p.332); to respond to 3 RQs:“(a) What factors do participants perceive to be critical in the decision-making processes when they took up HE? (b) What role do participants perceive that perceived cost had in the decision-making processes? (c) Do participants perceive that different kinds of perceived cost contributed differently in their decision-making?” (p.333)**Methodology:** Psychology/ Interpretive phenomenology; interviews with mature age students (n=6): all white, FinF, mix of years in study and average age of 42.7. Interviews focused on participants’ sensemaking when making decisions to go to university. IP analysis = “to elicit rich data about individuals’ lived experiences” (p.334) **Findings:** Common themes: internal struggles, benefitting others, changes in social domain*Internal struggles and changes*: some participants described how decision-making was linked to specific life events (change and upheaval), with common finding “the perception that changes to participants’ views of them- selves, other people and the future lay the ground for their decision to apply to university” (p.337). Example of Holly, who reflected on her earlier past/ early motherhood/ abusive relationship/ substance misuse. Another student was inspired by a walk, which made him question what he was doing.*Benefitting others*: participants described making decisions on the basis of wanting to make a difference, sometimes resulting from a clash of values and work expectations, or to use personal experience to help others*External changes*: participants were inspired/ prompted to consider higher education because of changes to their circumstances (e.g. job insecurity).Overall, authors suggest that participants “created narratives that made sense of experiences that they felt had enabled them to prioritise their personal goals and aspirations” (p.339). Authors argue that crafting narratives = important for making sense of their decisions to apply to higher education, based on a turning point/ series of turning points in their lives, that are making sense of identities and changes in self-identification, often through reinterpreting lives through past experience.**Core argument:** “This new insight is of importance to the field because it demonstrates the critical relevance of identity exploration and change in potential mature students who consider taking up HE” (p.342). |
| Shaw, A. (2014). [Examining the potential impact of full tuition fees on mature part-time students in English higher education](https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2013.778962), *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 38(6), 838–850.UKAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: *part-time students; fees; lifelong learning* | **Context:** UK higher education; widening participation; proposal to increase student fees to 9000GBP per year in 2012. Mature age students, perceptions of impact of increased student fee contribution on part-time learners, who had been largely ignored in debates about increasing fees/ student loans in the run up to the change in 2012. Author critiques the premise for passing financial responsibility onto individual student (that a graduate will earn on average 100k more than non-graduate) because of dilution effect of massification/ credential creep.Author notes how WP strategies have opened pathways for part-time (PT) students, who are mostly (93% in 2007/8) mature age and have caring/ work responsibilities. The changes to student fees meant that PT students were able to access student loan packages, which the author notes is ironic given that fees increased so dramatically, but still not maintenance grants like FT students: “or mature students, choices related to paying full fees and accruing the concomitant student loan debt are very different prospects than for their younger full-time undergraduate peers” (p.842), thus setting up the prospect of long-term debt. **Aims:** To examine “the problems which part-time mature learners may face with the advent of student loans and subsequent debt, given that they are usually combining complex lives with their studies, with less time to repay any loan in their working lifetime” (abstract) **Methodology:** Qualitative focus groups with PT mature age students (n=212) studying in a foundation degree at five centres: one university and four FE colleges. Asynchronous discussion board also used to collect data. Focus groups = focused on tuition fees and access to student loans/ perceptions of debt. Author notes limitation about cohort: they did not have to pay the increased fees so their perceptions = hypothetical. **Findings:** Several key themes: relief at dodging increased fees, fear of financial strife/ families suffering as a result of taking on more expensive education, anxiety about graduate employability/ worthiness of taking on debt for limited reward, perception that the increase would generate profit for universities, and a distrust in the government to maintain the repayment terms.Students also noted benefits of being able to access student loan program. None made reference to maintenance grants scheme (and lack of access for PT students)Students noted the potential for differential results for students on basis of gender, with perception that women would be more burdened by changes than men (see p.845).Older participants expressed concern that they wouldn’t be able to pay back the loan/ gain benefits of being more qualified in the job market (although some respondents saw this as benefit)**Core argument:** Confusion about fees, debt aversion and the lack of concern for PT learners (and the perceived additional barriers created for PT students) = inhibit government’s rhetoric and push for lifelong learning. Gendered differences = of concern: “so many of the female respondents [compared with none of the male participants] showed in considering higher education for themselves in a situation where they would be inflicting, in their view, a burden of debt on their whole family, and possibly jeopardising their children’s opportunities to go to college or university” (p.848–9). |
| Tett, L.; Hounsell, J.; Christie, H.; Cree, V. & McCune, V. (2012). [Learning from feedback? Mature students’ experiences of assessment in higher education](https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2011.627174), *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 17(2), 247–260.UKAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: *assessment; feeding forward; mature students* | **Context:** Mature age students entering an elite Scottish institution via FE college; role played by assessment on their experiences of university study. Authors note literature that points to importance of feedback on assessment for retention, and the context of assessment as persistent area of concern in National Student Survey**Aims:** To illuminate “aspects of learning from feedback from the perspective of students whose pre-university experiences of assessment provided a major contrast to that of the majority of their peers” (abstract)**Theoretical frame:****Methodology:** Longitudinal qualitative study of students’ transitions from FE into elite HE; paper reports on data collected via multiple interviews with subset of mature age students with childcare responsibilities (n=16, see p.248 for overview)**Findings:** *Initial feelings about assessment*: considerable disconnections between expectations and experiences, which authors note are particularly marked for these ‘non-traditional’ students. Participants discussed the contrasts between FE and university in terwms of no opportunities for inter-draft feedback, lesser guidance (less from tutors, less information in assignment briefs), new types of assessment tasks.*Experiences of assessment in Year 1*: student expectations of feedback impacted on how they used it/ how useful they found it. Authors discuss participants’ experiences/ perceptions of finding supportive peers/ doing group work. This can be great, but can also be isolating.*Experiences of assessment in middle years*: can be where differing expectations of feedback between tutors and students can be most significant/ do damage. Example of student who found the grades much lower/ assessment more difficult to reconcile at university than FE, and describing ‘I just put masses of work into it and hope for the best’, which leads authors to suggest that “a sizeable minority of students appeared to be progressing through their course of study with- out a clear understanding of what was required to improve their expressed cognitive skills” (p.252). Student data also suggested that by mid-way, students still weren’t sure how to use the feedback to improve their work, illustrating the importance of tutors dedicating time to “the importance of making sure that students understand what is being said and are willing to accept that it is fair” (p.253). Authors also note the emotional dimension of receiving feedback.*Experiences of assessment in final year*: Suggestion that by the final year, students had shifted their view of tutors/ feedback to supporting independent learning, with students describing heightened understanding of what was expected of them. Students also noted that the timing of multiple assignments made life more difficult for them, but also described strategies to manage competing demands on time.**Core argument:** For feedback to facilitate transition, it “needs to relate explicitly to students’ expectations if they are to learn from it” (p.257). Relationship between assessment and feedback (and tutors and students) = particularly dynamic for WP students, who have less familiarity with the system and practices, and who are therefore “were disadvantaged by their lack of knowledge of the system and were adjusting to a very different support and assessment regime” (p.257). Authors identify the challenges with feeding-forward (as opposed to feedback), meaning “that teaching staff should encourage an orientation towards learning goals through clear and timely comments where students use feedback to increase their understanding” (p.258).  |
| Tight, M. (2012). [Widening Participation: A Post-War Scorecard,](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00071005.2012.697541) *British Journal of Educational Studies,* 60(3), 211–226.UKAnnotation by Sally Baker Keywords: *widening participation, higher education, United Kingdom, post-war* | **Context:** WP in UK as a historic and ongoing concern for all universities as they seek to maintain and increase rates of participation (but beyond ‘traditional’ cohorts). In UK, the label ‘widening participation’ = 2 decades old, but activities and underlying intentions pre-date this. Definition/discussion of ‘traditional’ students on p.212, as well as pre-HE context (issues with schooling and entrance requirements).**Aim:** To examine achievements in WP; “to review post-war initiatives at widening participation, and produce an overall assessment, a ‘score card’, both of what has been achieved and what remains to be done” (p.211). To focus on participation of 4 groups: women, lower SES groups, mature (often p/t) students, ethnic minorities, but problematizes multiple membership of groups (‘multiply disadvantaged’?).**Theoretical frame:****Methodology:** Analysis of documents post-1945 and statistics (but notes limitations of comparisons due to different ways of collecting and measuring data)**Findings:** Discussion of 4 groups and ‘achievements’ to date:*Women*: Literature/ statistics illustrate the substantial rise in participation of women, from less than a third (reported in 1957) to nearly 57% in 2009/10. Themes emerging relate to intersections between gender/discipline, women taking up HE later in life, participation of women in postgrad study. Two main points: 1) women now outnumber men in HE, but there are more men in PG study and in positions of leadership; 2) participation of women is concentrated in particular subject areas.*Lower SES*: Similar pattern to women: less than 1/3 of applicants = working class (reported in 1957); however, unlike women there has been limited increase in participation of lower SES students (citing Crozier et al., 2008: ‘range of cultural behaviours’ = not learned by unprivileged children = inhibits HE participation).*Mature age*: Interest in this group started in 1980s. Author discusses research that survey older (21+) learners; Woodley et al. (1987) found that patterns in mature age tended to replicate patterns with school leavers along class and gender lines: In 2009/10, 6% of FT students = aged 30+ but 2/3 PT students = aged 30+ (see p.219). Mature age students much more likely to study part time (often in lower status universities). Strong connections made with social mobility.Ethnic minorities: Also more recent interest (like mature age students). Early research from 1987 (Brennan & McGeevor) found concentrations of particular ethnicities in discipline areas (e.g. Asian student = Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Science and Pharmacy; little participation in Humanities). Patterns in under/non-participation with Caribbean men and Bangladeshi women least likely to study in HE (see p.221).**Core argument:** Efforts to widen participation since 1945 to women, mature age, and ethnic minority students have largely been successful. However, efforts to increase participation of lower SES students has consistently been stunted. |
| Thomas, K. (2015). [Rethinking belonging through Bourdieu, diaspora and the spatial](file:///Users/sallybaker/Dropbox/Equity%20Literature/Annotated%20bibliographies/Rethinking%20belonging%20through%20Bourdieu%2C%20diaspora%20and%20the%20spatial), *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning,* 17(1), 37–48.UKAnnotation by Sally Baker  | **Context:** Draws on her doctoral work on retention strategies for part-time, mature learners in UK HE. **Aim:** Offers reconceptualization of notion of ‘belonging’ based on three sets of theories: Bourdieu’s toolkit (habitus, capital, field), Brah’s notion of diaspora and Massey’s notion of space/place = working from multiple theoretical territories helps to capture more complexities and according to Abes (2009) is “theoretical borderlands”**Theoretical frame:** Bourdieu’s theoretical toolkit helps to position belonging as a relational concept (drawing on habitus, field and capital) but “it risks homogenising internally diverse social groups and is limited in its articulation of belonging and not belonging as a lived experience” (p.42).Brah’s notion of diaspora = interpretive frame for analysing cultural, political, economic aspects of migration – relational positioning shapes “lived experience of a locality” (Brah, 1996: 189) and explore intersections between home and displacement (e.g. how do students feel about new environment of HE away from ‘home’ spaces?)Massey’s space/place = geographies of belonging. Space is “product of social relations shaped by power” (p.45) – space is temporal (space-time), signifies networks of social relationships and understandings. Places are “particular constellation of social relations” (Massey, 1997) and a “meeting up of histories, a multiplicity of trajectories” (Massey 2005:59). Space-place permit view of ‘activity spaces’ which have their own geographies of power. HEIs are ‘extroverted places’ – own institutional geographies of power create dominant narratives/ identity positions which are relational and imbued with/shaped by power relations**Core argument:** Thomas argues that from exploring experiences of p/t mature age learners, arguments are formed that challenge the dominant positioning of ‘belonging as a retention strategy’ because this analysis illustrates that the dominant view jars with diversity and complexity of their experiences. |
| Tones, M.; Fraser, J.; Elder, R.; & White, K. (2009). [Supporting mature-aged students from a low](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-009-9208-y)[socioeconomic background](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-009-9208-y), *Higher Education,* 58, 505–529.AUSAnnotation by Sally Baker Keywords *Low socioeconomic status, Mature-aged students, Non traditional students, Study barriers, Student support services, Student marketing, Family, Employers* | **Context:** Sought to examine perspectives of mature age (25+) students’ experiences of support services and barriers to study. Works from Cullity’s (2006) estimate that 38% of commencing UG students = mature age. Cites work that argues mature age students = similar performance to younger students; mature age students more likely to have family responsibilities that impact on learning. Discusses ‘cycle of low wage employment’ and education as a means out of it. Returning to education = impact on learning identities. Works from rationale that low SES mature age students need support: “Mature students from a LSES background are likely to require additional support services to compensate for probable financial, educational, and social disadvantages” (p.509).**Aim:** To examine a) barriers to study, b) use of current university support services, c) helpfulness of supportservices if used, and d) responses to a range of proposed support strategies not currently offered by a major Australian institution among mature-aged students (p.509)**Theoretical frame:****Methodology:** Mixed methods – interviews and focus groups; audit of university support services + online survey to explore patterns of usage/ barriers to usage. Study conducted in 2006 (presumably at QUT). Uni has 60% new enrolments = mature age students/ 16% = low SES. Attrition rates for mature/younger students = same/ retention/success ratios similar for mature/young low SES students. Low SES students enter via access scheme and go through specialised orientation program. Two-phased study: pilot study (focus groups/interviews with mature age students – findings fed into ‘multifaceted strategy’ to support mature low SES students (phase 2 = evaluation of these via online survey). Low SES identified by possession of health care card. 31 participants (10 = low SES: Year 1 – PG). Phase 1 = 23 participants (4 x focus groups); 8 x individual interviews. 223 students participated in online survey + statistical analysis**Findings:** Analysis suggests patterns in terms of usage according to SES, age and enrolment statusPhase 1: Two main barriers: responsibility conflict and adjustment to university lifeLack of awareness of support services = issueSuggestions generated = social events for mature age students, computing courses, greater flexibility in deliveryPhase 2:Low SES made more use of financial servicesNo statistic difference in perceived helpfulness of services (by SES)Low SES students less likely to use disability support/ counselling and academic servicesLow SES students reported not using services because services not available when needed (same for 45+ years)**Core argument:** Students aged 45+ need greater support adjusting to university life and support services are inadequate: “who indicated that several services were not available when they needed or wanted to use them” (p.519). Lack of awareness of where to go for help = significant: “uncertainty of where to go for assistance was reported by 76% of LSES students, and 54% of non LSES students suggests that current support services targeted at adjustment to university life are not adequately promoted, or that students are unaware of how services could help them” (p.523) |
| Townsend, R. (2010). [Developing 21st Century Diverse Adult Learning: Rural and Regional Student Access, Progression and Success in Higher Education](http://vuir.vu.edu.au/8980/), *The International Journal of Learning,* 17(2), 329–341.AUSAnnotation by Sally Baker Keywords: *Diversity, Adult Learning, Higher Education, Rural and Regional* | **Context:** Set in post- Bradley context (increased participation targets) and with La Trobe’s strategic/operational planning intention to raise participation of regional participation rates (responding to need to increase numbers of R&R students). Focus = outreach and “enhanced relationships” with schools, VET and community providers. Particular focus = mature age students (defined as 21+). Scope of the literature = major themes include issues with motivation and challenges related to time, responsibilities and moneyAlso set “in the context of increased competition between various cohorts for limited places in regional social science programs” (p.329).**Aim:** To identify how mature age individuals experience barriers in accessing, progressing and succeeding at university**Theoretical frame:****Methodology:** Qualitative educational research with context-specific ethnographic elements with staff and students in one Faculty. Participants = 10 staff (7 tenured discipline lecturers + 3 support services staff) – interviewed on experiences of recruiting, teaching and coordinating mature age students. Also: email survey with 20 (16 f; 4 m) mature age students (Year 3 and 4 of Social Work and Social Policy) about negative and positive aspects of being a mature student on regional campus**Findings:** Mature age students have additional barriers to participation in higher = financial and time constraints and distance. Participants report that “mature age students present with pre-existing competing priorities when entering higher education” (p.332) which create greater complexity. Participants perceived requesting support (either formal or informal) = positive impact on studies.Staff perception = mature age students have higher expectations and greater commitment; they are more willing to engage in ‘learning conversations’. Other perceived elements = connection to university and friends/ support networks. Major theme = significance of prior experiences; bringing a sense of ‘richness’ into classroom dynamic and more conceptual discussions (p.334). Staff did not feel separating younger and more mature age students was a useful strategy**Core argument:** Need to consider the principles of andragogy: “Adult learners in a regional community context could gain more from formal and informal learning experiences if all adult education programs adhered to well informed adult learning principles” (p.335) |
| Waller, R. (2006). [‘I don’t feel like ‘a student’, I feel like ‘me’!’: the over‐simplification of mature learners’ experience(s)](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13596740500508019), *Research in Post‐Compulsory Education*, 11(1), 115–130.UKAnnotation by Sally Baker  | **Context:** Categorising mature students according to demographic characteristics; resisting essentialising/ homogenous descriptions of mature students (on the back of the biographical turn, which privileges more individual accounts of experience). Discussion of literature on Access courses on p.120.**Aims:** To assess the utility of categorising mature students; to examine whether efforts to categorise mature students have resulted in reductive characterisations/ simplistic representations**Theoretical frame:****Methodology:** Draws on longitudinal study of Access students from FE into HE; narrative themes from interview data from four participants (Akhtar, Jim, Michaela, Meg)**Findings:** Three themes discussed: characterisations of school experience; the timing of the return to study; and discourses of mature studentship.*Characterisations of school experience*: common recounting of idea that participants were unsuccessful/ unmotivated at school/ didn’t apply themselves or wasn’t’ encouraged (‘made to’) apply themselves; in the case of Akhtar, this was recounted to be because he was encouraged to focus on school. For Akhtar, ‘Second chance education’ = way to “remedy earlier academic failings and social injustices via a re-engagement with formal learning” (p.122).*Timing of return to study*: return to study can be because of major life event, or can be part of long-standing plan. For 4 participants, reasons included feeling bored/ unfulfilled by work, re-evaluating life after a holiday, loss of family member, recent relationship breakdowns. Combination of factors/motivators = individual and context-dependent. Some of the participants’ reasons rested on having achieved material stability, which author argues suggests that “Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is of relevance—having fulfilled material wants, there follows a desire for self-actualisation through educational attainment” (p.124).*Discourses of mature studentship*: interpreted in contrast to more hedonistic/ ritual detachment from parents discourses of younger studentship. Some participants discussed this in relation to younger peers, others discussed in relation to younger self: “The manner in which these mature students construct themselves by simultaneously constructing the other, the younger idealised ‘student’ is a recurring theme in the accounts of the whole cohort” (p.125). Has implication for identity positions (e.g. fraud, imposter)**Core argument:** “the term ‘mature student’ has limited value beyond mere institutional convenience, or in assessing attempts to attract ‘non-traditional’ learners” (p.115). Essentialising is not useful for policy or practice: “it will always be problematic to attribute people to a *genus* or ‘type’ of student. Mature students *en masse* are not the homogenous group portrayed in much early research, and nor can they be satisfactorily further into a series of discrete categories or sub-groups” (p.126). |
| Webber, L. (2014). [Accessing HE for non-traditional students: ‘Outside of my position’,](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13596748.2014.872936) *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 19(1), 91–106.UKAnnotation by Sally BakerKeywords: *non-traditional students; HE admissions; widening participation; social mobility; positioning; capital* | **Context:** UK pre-undergraduate space. Examines admissions to Early Childhood foundation degree – scopes context of foundation degrees as response to Leith report but notes “there is a lack of understanding about how institutions might need to change to accommodate [widening participation]” (p.91). Author = programme manager of Early Childhood foundation degree – set unwritten rule that all applicants need interview pre-enrolment (gatekeeper for drop out) – notes she may have “unconsciously adopted a deficit discourse, negatively positioning these students as likely to fail on the programme” (p.92), so interview = opportunity for non-traditional students to challenge that assumption.**Theoretical frame:** Bourdieu – capital, field, habitus**Methodology:** Narrative inquiry. Semi-structured interviews conducted with applicants (n=7); paper focuses on 3 participants in particular: Kat, Sarah and Chelsea. Data analysed with ‘thematic approach’ to test utility of broad representations of students**Findings:** Kat = mature age student, had NVQ level 3 in childcare, FinF, mother, part-time work in preschool. Cried during admissions interview because of emotional strain of having to prove herself worthyChelsea = 21 years old, preschool assistant, had A-levels and NVQ level 3, FinF but had partner who went through foundation degree in businessSarah = mature age, FinF, mother, had done NVQ level 3 as mature student.Emergent themes: *emotions* (author found this ‘surprising’): “Students feel quite exposed and open to criticism, therefore seeing it as both labour intensive and emotionally challenging” (p.98). *Positioning*: ‘high stocks of emotional capital’ = give students confidence and a sense of worth; also discusses how students were positioned by others (e.g., example of Sarah’s mother on p.100). *Changing positions*: author notes shifts in students’ approaches/ confidence. Interview could be seen as offering inspiration to students (a sense of ‘I can do this’). *Accumulating capital*: acquisition of study skills = reported by students; author argues that “through giving the students sufficient time and support, it could be argued that they were then in a more able position to accumulate capital and overcome any disadvantages once the programme had commenced” (p.102). However, Sarah dropped out, despite this ‘accrual of capital’**Core argument:** Recommendations: 1) institutions need to work out how to value individual experience and strengths that students bring with; 2) locate the problem with the institution, not the individual; 3) there is power in the interview (to bring forward tacit strengths and offer a space for myths and assumptions to be challenged).  |