PRACTICAL WISDOM AND DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

PHRONESIS, ART AND NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

SAMANTHA BROADHEAD AND MARGARET GREGSON

Practical Wisdom and Democratic Education

"This is a thoughtful and richly researched book that examines and fully explores the issues around access and inclusion. Having taught mature and non-traditional students in fine art, the case studies resonate with my experience as a teacher. The conclusions provide excellent practical advice and recommendations for art and design staff and future Access to HE students."

—Sam Ingleson, *University of Salford, UK*

"This book deserves to be read widely by students, teacher and researchers. It offers a refreshing, easily accessible account that places a clear lens onto the learning journey of four mature students studying for degrees in art and design. The pages open up an important discussion on the experience of often marginalized and silenced voices; voices that matter. The passion and commitment the authors have for empowering their learners is evident throughout. And touching upon a mix of philosophical understanding, they expose the power of democratic education to transform the classroom and transform lives."

—Vicky Duckworth, *Edge Hill University, UK*

Samantha Broadhead
Margaret Gregson

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Phronesis, Art and Non-traditional Students

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Samantha Broadhead
Leeds Arts University
Leeds, UK

Margaret Gregson
Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training
University of Sunderland
Sunderland, UK

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To Holly Georgia Broadhead who was clever, creative and kind.

Foreword

Writing on Access and Inclusion issues in education requires much investment in ethics and some deep thinking around attainment, exclusion and in how the institution might misrecognise the significance of emotional contexts of learning. These features of thought, research and personal investment in students are sometimes downplayed by educational institutions, who may feel the key purpose of education and its research is primarily in tracking successful data and by how their students progress to prestigious universities. There are many unexpected barriers Access students face in their learning journeys, but they also bring a richness to the institution. The practical wisdom or *phronesis* Access students often bring to arts institutions is undervalued by both students and the institution. Therefore, this book is a welcome source of information. It provides a new and academic approach to evaluating knowledge, class and democracy in education, using the concept of *phronesis* as a tool to encounter this awareness.

To reflect on real human experiences in education is not only ethical but it always makes the sociological aspects of education come alive. This is how this book approaches its own ontology, by using data from interviewing students who have already progressed and applying key theoretical concepts which have historically challenged formal ideas of learning. This approach demonstrates a deep awareness of students' struggles with their desires and fears to learn, and attempts to move on.

These matters and the ways of encountering different forms of practical knowledge students bring have routinely been unappreciated, particularly where institutions become fixated with achievement targets or the repetition of existing, often conservative, pedagogies.

There are still many reliable sources in the sociology of education which examine thinking about the student experience. The extent to which such matters are seen as socially derived, that is the sociologically determined routes for students as Bernstein describes in his discourses are important. Bernstein's ideas around framing and historical and vertical tropes are still vital to our current day understanding of *phronesis* in current educational settings. As Broadhead usefully determined in her previous work, Bernstein requires re-examination to enable a worthwhile examination of class and art education today.

Historically, educational thinkers, including those this book references such as Aristotle, Aquinas, Morris and Bernstein, employed in their writing an ethical or moral imperative towards education. They perceived learners in an ideal world would be those who made their own judgements. These theorists usefully suggested that pedagogues could support such endeavours by enabling notions of practical wisdom within teaching. These ideas about *phronesis* cannot be discounted in the search for a good education today.

Furthermore, as the schools' curriculum focus has now shifted away from creative subjects to broad-based examined subjects, many students experience art differently. Access and post-Access students may have acquired their creative knowledge and expertise in a range of contexts including via the hidden or invisible curriculum. Some of these ways can provide enriching opportunities for artists and students. Art students may have gained prior knowledge from the visual, popular and material cultures that surround them. They may already have craft and design knowledge from making work at home, being taught by relatives or from travel abroad. Institutions cannot imply that a particular route into arts education is the norm. As this book suggests, many post-Access students are seen as 'mature, non-traditional and non-standard', which also means they may have a wealth of prior knowledge, yet inexplicably, their past experiences are sometimes seen as invalid.

Sometimes the derivation of creative knowledge today relies on accidental points of access and often self-funded lessons, similar to the nineteenth-century design schools who taught the drawing and painting skills which could be used in industry. These were in effect an access route into both industry and education. Today, there are fewer such access points, and instead, many economic reasons why students cannot gain access or progression into higher education. This book addresses the context of Access today against the development of art education backgrounds.

The book provides a useful account of post-Access education and makes recommendations which are urgently needed today, as are the post-Access *phrominos* as students in our arts institutions and creative practices, in order to give a wider view of society and creativity, reflecting the world in which we live.

London, UK Kate Hatton

Preface

The ability of students to develop and exercise practical wisdom as part of a democratic educational experience is important because it helps them face the anticipated and unanticipated barriers to their learning they encounter in the course of their studies and beyond.

Students often study in contexts that are uncertain. For example, the study that forms the basis of this book coincided with the aftermath of the UK general election of 2010 which brought in a new Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government. Economically, Access and higher education (HE) professionals were working in a time of austerity which meant provision was threatened by possible cuts to educational budgets. HE was being restricted by government funding policies and the introduction of £9000 fees had a negative impact on the numbers of mature students applying to HE through Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). At the time of writing, part-time study which offers mature students a practical route into HE is still in decline.

The post-Access to HE students who are the subject of this book aspire to become artists or designers. They have taken a risk in changing their lives by doing an Access course then entering art and design HE. In order to fulfil their aspirations this book argues that they should be able to overcome the challenges they may face as 'non-traditional' students by drawing upon their capacity for *phronesis* (practical wisdom).

This book argues that a good education is one where students are able to be in the presence of others who are engaged in the act of deliberating wisely.

In other words institutions of education should enable and encourage students to exercise practical wisdom in order to make good judgements about their own learning. Basil Bernstein's model of a democratic education is explored as one way of developing and valuing the practical wisdom of students.

The book aims to make the work of Bernstein accessible to those interested in the sociology of education (students, academics, managers and researchers). In particular, the book speaks directly to students, Access to HE tutors and lecturers in art and design HE. It is hoped they will find the recommendations in this book useful regarding what is good and what is right in democratic curriculum design and pedagogy. The recommendations are written within the context of art and design education in particular but could be applied more widely in other subjects and disciplines.

Chapter 1 establishes the historical and current context of Access education in the UK. In the 1970s and 1980s working-class participation in HE was encouraged and celebrated. Recently there have been fewer attempts at promoting social mobility through educational policies. The chapter describes how post-Access to HE students are routinely referred to as 'mature, non-traditional or non-standard'. The literature concerning the transition of students, and in particular mature students, to HE is then reviewed. It is argued that mature students' previous experiences contribute towards their practical wisdom and that this potentially helps them become adaptive in new situations and to be able to navigate around barriers they may experience during their periods of study.

Chapter 2 introduces the work and ideas of Basil Bernstein. It recognises his contribution as an important thinker to the discipline of Education who provides a theoretical framework or lens with which to analyse the experiences of post-Access to HE students during their degrees in art and design. It begins by describing his early work in relation to pedagogic codes, framing and classification, and horizontal and vertical discourses. His ideas about progressive education are discussed in relation to visible and invisible pedagogy. The argument within this chapter is

that Bernstein's work describes the relationships between pedagogy, identity and social control including his ideas about democratic education and that these offer insights into how social mobility and social justice might be better promoted.

Chapter 3 offers a framework for understanding how practical wisdom can be enabled or disabled within an educational context. It provides a theoretical lens with which to bring the experiences of post-Access to HE students into focus. Aristotle described practical wisdom as being gained through a long life of experience. Post-Access to HE students often have rich life experiences which potentially can help them make good judgements about their education that contributes towards living a good life for themselves and their families. Narratives of their experiences can be understood as the art of representing and capturing decision-making, actions and consequences. Chapter 3 argues that students as well as educators can use practical wisdom to act well for others: their peers, their families and for the common good.

The four case studies which make up Chaps. 4, 5, 6 and 7 were chosen because they represent the range of diverse people who undertake an Access to HE course. Thus, Chad's narratives were selected because at the time she was a white woman in her 40s who was a mother with extensive caring responsibilities and who aspired to be a textiles designer. At the time Bob was a white working-class man in his 50s who dreamed of studying at Art school but had been discouraged from doing so by his family when he left school. During the course of the study Eliza was a middle-aged, well-educated black woman who loved learning for her own sake; she dreamed of a possible future of being in a more creative career. Finally, Jane was a middle-class woman in her 50s who wanted to take part in education for her own sense of achievement now that her children were grown up and flourishing.

The participants had completed an Access to HE course at a specialist art college and had graduated in June 2011; they were due to start their degrees in art and design in the following September. They were all undertaking their HE in either a college or a local HE institution. In the interests of privacy and confidentiality their identities are anonymised within the case studies. The students chose their own pseudonyms at the first meeting of the project. This protected the institution, individual

members of staff and participants. The process is then reflected on critically to ensure that claims that are inferred from the work are tentative and contingent.

Everyone who took part in the project had completed an Access to HE course at a specialist art college and had graduated in June 2011; they were due to start their degrees in art and design in the following September. The students' stories were listened to and transcribed at six points during the three years of their degrees. Thus the case studies represent the post-Access to Students' experiences over time and not at just one fixed point.

The conclusion draws the arguments of the book together by exploring three questions. Firstly, did the post-Access to HE students represented in the case studies receive a democratic education when they studied in art and design HE? Secondly, were the post-Access to HE students able to draw upon their practical wisdom in order to act well for themselves and others while studying their degrees in art and design? And finally, did receiving a democratic education also entail students as well as staff being able to deliberate wisely according to their previous experiences and practical wisdom?

At the end of the conclusion there are some recommendations aimed at those people teaching and managing Access to HE programmes: those people teaching and managing HE art and design programmes and those Access to HE art students who dream of becoming artists or designers.

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We also appreciate the high-quality academic support received from Professor Mike Collier.

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Leeds, UK — Samantha Broadhead
Sunderland, UK — Margaret Gregson

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Non-traditional Students in Art and Design Higher Education

Chapter Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to establish the current context of art and design Access to Higher Education (HE) in the United Kingdom. In the 1970s and 1980s working-class participation in HE was actively encouraged and celebrated. The movement to widen participation in HE aimed to ensure that the demographic of students studying for degrees was more representative of the population as a whole, gained momentum in the 1990s and into the new millennium. Recently, however, there have been fewer serious attempts at promoting social mobility through educational policies. Indeed, some recent studies suggest that the limited gains in social mobility achieved over the last 30–40 years are now in reverse (Goldthorpe 2016; Blanden et al. 2004). This chapter describes how post-Access students are routinely referred to in policy documents and in the literature of educational research as 'mature, non-traditional or non-standard'. It is argued in this chapter that these labels disguise the class-based selection that occurs in non-compulsory education, and that post-Access students studying for HE degrees in the field of art and design are systemically constructed as the 'pedagogised other'. The literature concerning the transition of students, and in particular mature students,

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to HE is then reviewed. It is argued that mature students' previous experiences of education and of life contribute towards the judgements they make during their degrees (their practical wisdom or *phronesis*), and that this can potentially help them to adapt to new situations and to be able to navigate their way around their situatedness as 'the pedagogised other' and the additional barriers they may experience during their periods of study.

Outline of the Empirical Research

The post-Access students' personal narratives about their educational experiences were recorded from the meetings that took place over three years. The recordings were transcribed and critical moments were then identified and analysed (Andrews et al. 2013, p. 49). Each participant's collection of stories was represented in the form of a case study (Andrews 2014; Butler-Kisber 2010; Clandinin and Connelly 2004). The process was critically reflected upon to ensure that the claims inferred from the work were tentative and contingent.

Of the eight participants who took part in the study, four were selected for inclusion within this book because they represented the diversity of people who undertake Access to HE diplomas. Chad was a white woman and mother with extensive caring responsibilities who aspired to be a textiles designer. Bob was a white working-class man in his 50s who had always dreamed of studying at art school. Eliza was a middle-aged, well-educated black woman who loved learning for its own sake. She hoped further study would lead to a more creative career. Finally, Jane was a middle-class woman in her 50s who wanted to take part in education for her own sense of achievement now that her children were grown up.

Bernstein's (1958, pp. 160–161) definition of class was used to describe students; the middle classes were defined by educational achievement and employment in skilled or non-manual work alongside a particular attitude towards the achievement of long-term goals.

By using these criteria, Eliza could be described as middle class because she had achieved educational success and pursued a professional career. Bob had worked within industry while having a history of frustrated

educational participation. This began with not being able to go to art school. This was because gaining stable work, rather than studying art after Bob left school, was seen as an important priority to him and his family. Bob's history and outlook on life seemed to indicate he was working class.

Chad and Jane's class identity appeared to be more ambivalent as they had not enjoyed the educational success of Eliza. Jane dropped out of her 'A' levels, feeling that she was not an academic person. After a short time in employment Jane got married and had children. Chad had previously achieved an 'A' level but this was only to fill in time until she could join the Navy. Both women had an attitude that they could meet their long-term goals if they worked at it, which would suggest a more middle-class background.

The method of narrative inquiry enabled an analysis of localised situations or contexts. Therefore, generalisations could not be easily made or applied to other, different contexts. However, human stories can have a powerful impact on others and provide models for possible action by other practitioners and students (Nussbaum 1990; Skilleås 2006). The narratives, presented in this book, have been co-constructed between the researchers and the participants, whilst acknowledging that there is no one 'true' story.

Who Are Post-Access to HE Students?

During the 1980s there was an expansion of 'non-conventional students' into HE which coincided with an increase in Access courses (Wakeford 1993; Osborne et al. 1997). The Access route was seen as the 'third' way for students to enter university (DES 1987). Parry (1996, p. 11) claimed that Access courses were set up for those students who were 'excluded, delayed or otherwise deterred by a need to qualify for (university) entry in more conventional ways'. Currently, HEIs (higher education institutions) have a range of strategies for including mature students on their degree courses. Some accept students who have studied an Access course in a Further Education college. Others deliver their own form of Access or enabling course within the university or HEI; these routes may also

have a direct progression route for students onto a degree programme within the institution.

In 2011/2012 there were 42,150 students studying on Access to HE courses and 6% of University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) applicants accepted onto an HE course held an Access qualification (QAA 2013, p. 12). There was a 22% drop in numbers of these programmes specialising in art and design from the previous year (QAA 2013, p. 3). Recently, a report by the Independent Commission on Fees (2013) has shown that, since 2010 the introduction of the £9000 fees regime has had a serious and damaging impact on 'second chance' students. There has been a 15.4% drop in applications to HE from people over 25.

The focus of this paper is on those students who had achieved an Access to HE diploma in art and design and had gone onto study an appropriate degree. The objectives of the Access course were to work with mature students to enable them: to achieve a Level 3 qualification, to prepare a portfolio of work and to progress onto an art and design degree. The Access course was aimed at mature students who had not been in conventional education for at least a year. What constituted a mature student had become progressively vaguer; students could be as young as 19, but may have found the pace of an Access course more suitable to their needs than a pre-BA Foundation course or 'A' levels, which were seen as the more traditional route to degrees (Hudson 2009, p. 25).

Within a typical cohort there was usually considerable variety in the ages of students ranging from 20- to 70-years-old and upwards; often they had a diverse set of experiences and backgrounds. It was therefore not useful to make assumptions about the class, gender, race or age of these students, as non-traditional, mature students were not (and arguably have never been, nor will ever be) a homogenous group (Osborne et al. 2004, p. 295). Mature students with an Access to HE diploma tended to be a diverse group of people (Busher et al. 2012; Broadhead and Garland 2012).

However, James (1995, p. 453) has shown how mature students in HE have been described in terms of what they have in common as a group and of how they differ from traditional age-at-entrance students. Wilson (1997, p. 362) made a very good point about the inconsistency between the status assigned to them by the institution and their age. Mature students with Access backgrounds tended to be in a different stage in

their life, and it could be argued that they were not typical students who had studied 'A' levels and the pre-BA Foundation course (Penketh and Goddard 2008, p. 316). HEIs presented and promoted degree courses and university life through open days and programme materials that assumed that

> the normative 'middle-class' construction of students emphasises the opportunity of leaving home (to a protected environment and in gradual stages), meeting new friends (who might become a bedrock of friends for life) and going to new places – a formative experience that broadens horizons. (Christie et al. 2005)

This image projected by institutions does not represent Access students who tend to stay at home having established lives, jobs, families and responsibilities. They may have working-class or middle-class backgrounds. There is a danger that by describing Access students as non-traditional or untypical, they are being represented in a pejorative manner. Osborne et al. (2004, p. 296) attempted to further categorise mature students into different types of subgroups. They could be *delayed traditional students* who are in their 20s, but actually share a lot of common interests and values with 18-year-olds. Secondly, *late starters* who due to life changes like redundancy or children leaving home seek 'a new start in life'. Thirdly, mature students can be *single parents* who are in need of improving job prospects through gaining qualifications and being role models for their children. Fourthly, *careerists* are those who used qualifications to develop at work. Fifthly, *escapees* who wish to leave behind a 'dead end job', and finally, *personal growers* who have a love of learning for its own sake (Osborne et al. 2004).

Tedder and Biesta (2008), researching in the field of lifelong learning, drew attention to how mature students are beginning to view education in a more instrumental way linked to employment rather than personal development. As a result of this, it is becoming increasingly recognised that the profile of Access students is becoming younger and more career-focused (Busher et al. 2012). Participants in this research study were (with one exception) people who had not participated in HE before. Wakeford (1993) argued that Access students have few, but rarely no,

previous qualifications. Bowl (2001) made a similar point where she argued that mature students had often attempted to participate in education before but had been frustrated by various barriers so did not always succeed. One way of explaining why 'non-traditional' students are frustrated in formal education is to consider how they are positioned as the 'other' by the dominant pedagogical discourses and practices they encounter in their studies.

Post-Access to HE Students and Otherness

Hatton (2012) has argued that the values, beliefs and positions of an institution always take central stage. She described how the word 'pedagogised' implied something which was done to the student by the institution. By referencing the work of Atkinson (2002), she showed how pedagogised identities of students and courses developed from symbolic public activity including marketing and signature learning and teaching practices. Within the area of art and design signature pedagogies include the studio critique, open briefs and studio practice. This resonates with Shreeve's (2011) point that art and design practitioners use 'pedagogies of uncertainty' as a means of facilitating creativity. These practices are represented as the norm within some forms of art and design education.

Burke and McManus (2011) have shown how worthy art and design students are recruited onto certain degree programmes because they demonstrate risk-taking and invention in their portfolios which represent middle-class notions of taste. Bernstein would say that recruiting students with a similar age, and who also conform to normative art and design practices, would help to create a sense of horizontal solidarity within the student body which encourages the situation of some students as 'other'. Hatton (2012, p. 39) developed her argument further to point out that the legitimating power of tutors and institutions led to the normalisation of certain ways of learning which could marginalise some students on some courses who did not 'fit' in. These students are then situated or positioned as the pedagogised 'other', those different to the norm. *Othering* language and curriculum practices used in some institutions construct a person or a