

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Abstracts

(alphabetically by lead presenter first name)

Adam Christopher, Stephanie Evans & Janine Appleton

Child Agency to Support High Quality Learning

Our presentation explores how child agency can be intentionally developed as a whole-school approach to support high-quality learning, engagement, and wellbeing in primary education. Drawing on research from cognitive science, curriculum theory, children's rights, and developmental psychology, we argue that learning is most effective when children are empowered as active partners in shaping their educational experiences. We examine how agency emerges naturally in early years provision through play, curiosity, and exploration, and consider how this disposition can diminish as children progress through school unless deliberately sustained. We also consider the role of curriculum design, pedagogical consistency, assessment practices, leadership opportunities, and school culture in enabling or constraining agency, with particular attention to cognitive load, formative assessment, and pupil voice. Contemporary challenges to child agency, including rising anxiety, reduced opportunities for risk-taking and play, and the influence of digital culture, are also explored. Practical classroom strategies are presented through a structured model of negotiated freedom, alongside key hygiene factors such as time, social dynamics, and teacher workload. We conclude by positioning child agency as central to both academic success and lifelong learning, requiring coherent and values-driven whole-school commitment.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Alicia Blanco-Bayo

Closing the 'compassion gap': Why loving thy neighbour matters in universities.

This paper identifies how systematically preventable distress is generated by unmanageable workloads and rigid institutional expectations and calls for urgent attention to the growing 'compassion gap' in Higher Education (HE). In a sector dominated by neoliberal performance metrics, I argue that compassion must be reclaimed not only as a private virtue, but as a professional capability. Drawing on recent literature and conversations with colleagues, this reflection explores loving thy neighbour as an act of resistance. It suggests that the gap can be bridged through *cariño* -spontaneous, immediate, and intense demonstrations of love- as the vehicle to cultivate belonging and community. By prioritising the nurturing of individual virtues over metric-fixation, academic development can support staff to recognise and respond to everyday struggles and promote a more humane, sustainable and loving academic culture. I therefore advocate for embedding relational practices and *cariño*-based interventions in professional development programmes, alongside future research into the long-term impacts of compassion-led academic environments.

Key words: compassion gap, relational, *cariño*, academic development.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Alicia Blanco-Bayo, Maria Reraki, Annabel Yale & Kenny Greenough

Beyond prescribed relational standards in Higher Education: Generation Z+'s understanding of care as ECEC students.

This study explores how care is enacted in Higher Education (HE), in particular in Early Years Education and Care (EYEC) programmes. It examines the relational practices that shape the experiences of Generation Z+ students (born 1997-2012). This digitally fluent, socially engaged cohort brings diverse experiences and expectations as they prepare for ECE roles; these perspectives are central to our inquiry.

Using a collective case study design, data were collected through student focus groups and audio accounts from the research team. The data collection process encompassed three student cohorts across two data collection phases (November–December; May–June). Initial qualitative findings reveal that students perceive care not only as a procedural or administrative function, but as an ongoing, responsive process. At this stage, the data tells us that the depth of lecturer–student relationships can positively influence students' confidence, self-esteem, communication, and reflective skills. Importantly, these relationally developed skills extend beyond the academic sphere, and can impact students' emerging professional identities and practices as Early Years practitioners.

The research challenges current conceptions that perceive care as a prescribed process and instead positions care as a central relational part of day-to-day life in HE (e.g., brief, in-the-moment check-ins during sessions and in passing). As we collect and analyse data in subsequent phases, we aim to draw on the expertise of HE academics in SEND, psychology, relational pedagogy and leadership. Re-defining care in HE will offer a practice perspective for curriculum design and staff development within university environments and beyond.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Allison Moore (Edge Hill University), Tom Andrews & Edward Ashcroft (The Bridge Integrated Learning Space [ILS])

Working with families without hope, creating aspirations for impossible futures, resetting what can be achieved with learners whose profiles are radically different through an integrated educational approach and beyond.

This presentation explores the work of the Integrated Learning Space [ILS] a 'specialist' special school in London, set up to support students with complex additional needs. The school operates within a completely student-centred model and works with parents in a fully integrated way, ensuring cohesion between the school, the families and the services they access. For the majority of the families we support the idea of 'Hope' does not exist in the way that it would probably be experienced by families of typically developing students; and 'Education' for these families is something that they learn to face rather than collaborate in, usually experienced as – an unending series of problematic meetings fuelled by a continual sense of isolation, mistrust and futility shunted between an ever widening range of providers - a carousel of hopelessness. The ILS addresses this problem from the outset and works to develop a sense of hope and aspiration within families, building integrated thinking and practices which focus on the priorities the parents face so that families feel heard. For many of our parents this may have felt completely out of reach, having typically detached themselves from the idea of their child growing into adulthood with any sense of self agency, personhood or purpose, or as someone able to make their mark on the community and in society. This presentation focuses on a series of interviews which formed part of a project at the ILS examining the experiences of the parents before and after their children had attended the school.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Allison Moore, Alicia Blanco-Bayo, Marie Caslin, Marlena Chrostowska, Maria Reraki & Clare Woolhouse

The Schools White Paper 2026 (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities): Radical Reform or the Emperor's New Clothes

The recently released consultation paper on reform to SEND provision in England recommends, what is considered to be, the most radical reform since the SEND code of Practice, aiming to balance inclusion, financial sustainability, and clarity regarding provision. It will require that schools review their workforce, training, structures and resources, with the hope that children and their families could see a more consistent and less confrontational system over time.

Although the White Paper promises to achieve significant outcomes, it lacks detail regarding the practical measures through which these outcomes will be achieved. Specifically, it is not clear how children with high support needs who cannot be educated in mainstream schools and children who currently receive education other than at school (EOTAS) will be supported. Similarly, despite commitment to workforce development to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills to identify needs early, what that looks like in terms of initial teacher training and continuing professional development needs to be unpacked.

This will be a creative workshop where we will jointly explore with the audience what inclusion looks like in order to meet the needs of all children to ensure they thrive. If you want to let your creative side free, come and join us!

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Anna Mariguddi

What factors influence teacher pedagogy? A model of informal-formal equilibrium

In this presentation, the contested nature of informal and formal pedagogical approaches will be discussed, illuminating a number of complexities and compounding factors that influence teacher pedagogy in contemporary education. To aid increased understanding and capture some of the complexities of informal and formal teaching and learning, new terminology and an accompanying model will be proposed: a pedagogy of informal-formal equilibrium (Mariguddi 2026). The model will be informed by the findings of two key projects that trace the development of informal learning pedagogy in music education on a national and international scale, spanning across 10 years of study.

A pedagogy of informal-formal equilibrium includes consideration of various factors which impact upon teacher practice, for example, student needs, teacher identity and values, school context, policy and professional responsibility. The model draws upon the work of Folkestad (2006), imagining informal-formal pedagogies on a continuum, on which teachers can slide along and flip between either end. Furthermore, additional considerations are included to increase the dimensions of the model: the situation, learning style, ownership and situation (Folkestad, 2006). A pedagogy of informal-formal equilibrium can apply to a variety of educational contexts, and delegates will be encouraged to reflect upon how the model might apply to their own practice.

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Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Anna Woolley

Strengthening Support for Students with Care Experience in Higher Education: Evaluating the Impact of a Multi-Institutional Practitioner Conference

Students with experience of care or estrangement (CEES) continue to face persistent inequalities in access, retention, mental health, and financial stability across further and higher education (Baker, 2024; Feinstein et al., 2025; Smith and Gunning, 2025). To strengthen sector capacity to address these challenges, the Edge Hill University Widening Access and Student Success team developed a regional annual practitioner conference underpinned by a structured Theory of Change (ToC) planning and evaluation framework. The intervention aimed to increase practitioner knowledge and confidence; embed CEES voice in the design of support interventions; and build sustainable collaboration across institutions and organisations.

Prior to the conference, cross-sector ToC workshops were facilitated with colleagues from further and higher education institutions, Local Authorities, and third-sector organisations working directly with CEES students. These workshops aligned long-term outcomes, identified key mechanisms of change, and shaped the conference programme around evidence-informed priorities, including FE and HE educational pathways, awareness of available support offers, and interconnection of institutional support processes. The ToC also informed the evaluation design.

A mixed-methods evaluation was conducted using pre- and post-conference surveys, session-level feedback, and qualitative responses. The 2024–25 conference engaged 56 delegates from 42 institutions and organisations, with 46 attendees completing matched surveys (82.1% response rate). Measures assessed changes in confidence, knowledge, networking, and the influence of student-led contributions.

Findings demonstrate substantial increases in practitioner confidence across all areas, with qualitative evidence identifying the conference as a catalyst for cross-institutional collaboration and sustained sector engagement. This evaluation highlights the value of structured, multi-institutional practitioner conferences in enhancing support for under-represented student groups, particularly CEES.

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Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

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Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Barnaby Sargent Megicks, George Aird, Karen Bloyce, David Haycock, Helen O’Keeffe, Andy Smith, Sarah Ward & Rachel Wilcock (Edge Hill University)

Examining the Mental Health Literacy of Secondary Trainee Teachers in a University-based Initial Teacher Education Programme

Secondary school teachers are expected to support pupil mental health, a requirement embedded in teacher development, statutory curricula, and educational policy (Department for Education, 2021; 2024; 2025). Consequently, teachers require the necessary skills and confidence needed to help identify, support and where appropriate work alongside other colleagues to help signpost pupils with mental health challenges to relevant professional services. It is therefore essential to develop trainee teachers' mental health literacy (MHL) as they enter the workforce to better prepare them for these occupational responsibilities. This study examined the MHL of 153 secondary trainee teachers attending a university-based postgraduate initial teacher education programme in north-west England. Participants across subjects (English, Maths, Physical Education, Computing, Geography, History, Religious Education and Science) completed the Mental Health Literacy Questionnaire for Education (Hatcher, 2018), a 26-item and 4-subscale validated tool using a 1-5 Likert scale (strongly disagree - strongly agree). Overall MHL item scores were positive ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.84$), ranging from 3.59 to 4.77. Amongst subscales, 'Role Clarity' was highest-scoring (4.68 ± 0.62), followed by 'Expectancies' (4.57 ± 0.74) and 'Professional Relational Skills' (4.23 ± 0.83), with 'Teaching and Leading in a Mentally Healthy Classroom' lowest-scoring (4.15 ± 0.85). Results show that trainees possessed positive MHL, aligning with practical and policy demands. Subscale results indicate strong role expectations, but suggest trainees had less confidence in the technical and classroom skills needed to meet these demands. The findings have important practical and policy implications, especially for those delivering and experiencing initial teacher education. These include the need to further support trainees' MHL, including their knowledge, skills and behaviours in relation to the management of pupils' mental health needs. Future qualitative research

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

should examine the nature and impact of trainees' MHL and its impact on their day-to-day practices in schools.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Ben Thomas

Systematic Synthetic Phonics and Bilingual Learners: Primary Teachers' Perspectives, Perceptions and Experiences

Against the backdrop of rising linguistic diversity in English primary schools, this mixed-methods study examines the efficacy of Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) instruction and the statutory Year 1 Phonics Screening Check (PSC) for bilingual learners. Guided by early reading and second-language acquisition frameworks, the research explores the tension between policy-driven phonics fidelity and the pedagogical flexibility required to meet diverse learner needs.

By analysing national PSC datasets (2011–2024) alongside qualitative data from Key Stage 1 teachers, the study highlights a persistent 1–2% attainment gap between pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and monolingual English-speaking pupils. While teachers employ various adaptive strategies, such as dual-language resources and visual aids, many feel constrained by the prescriptive nature of SSP schemes and performative assessment pressures. Furthermore, findings reveal significant gaps in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD), leaving many educators underprepared to confidently support early reading development for bilingual learners.

Aligning with the conference theme of 'Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible through Education', this presentation advocates for a more inclusive, balanced approach to early literacy. By recommending targeted policy reforms for the PSC and enhanced teacher training, the study calls for a reimagination of phonics pedagogy; one that recognises bilingual learners' linguistic assets and promotes equitable literacy outcomes in increasingly multilingual classrooms.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Bob Alderdice

Representations of Disability in Children's Comics

In her seminal work, Rudine Bishop describes books as metaphorical mirrors and windows into children's lives (Bishop, 1990). She suggests that, through literature, we can reflect on our own lives but also gain insight into the broader human experience. Contemporary research builds upon Bishop's work, suggesting that books can offer opportunities to develop acceptance and empathy (Tejero Hughes and Talley, 2025) and should provide nuanced and multifaceted depictions of human experiences (Krishnaswami and Beaton, 2022; Enriquez, 2021) in order to challenge or dismantle stereotypical and marginalising depictions of people (De Rijke, 2020; Botelho, 2021). In recent years there has been an increase in the popularity of comics in children's literature with the category of children's comics and graphic novels generating record sales in the UK in 2024 (Nielsen, 2025). One of the main stayers of the British comics industry is *The Beano* – a weekly children's humour comic which has been published since 1938 and still records sales of approximately 50,000 issues per week (McLaughlin, 2022 cited in Hibbett, 2024).

The poster which I intend to submit relates to a current research project which seeks to understand and evaluate the portrayals of disability within the field of children's comic books (specifically, *The Beano*) with the aim of contributing to the existing conversation around the importance of inclusive, diverse and precise representation in children's literature and encouraging comprehension, acceptance and empathy among young readers (Tejero Hughes and Talley, 2025).

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Carrie-Ann Sturt

Expanding Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis using Harry Beck style mapping: Innovative visualisation technique for qualitative research when exploring the complex lived experiences of FE educators and leaders navigating systemic challenges to agency, wellbeing and the purpose of SEND education.

Further Education (FE) operates within a complex and interconnected professional landscape shaped by teacher agency, autonomy, emotional labour and institutional pressures. Transformative education foregrounds pedagogical approaches that promote critical thinking, self-reflection and action for social change, challenging dominant assumptions through experiential learning. This study explores internal processes within FE by examining participants' lived experiences across a range of professional roles, from trainee teacher and FE lecturers in mainstream and alternative provision to support staff and senior leaders. These perspectives are understood as interconnected elements within a wider system, while valuing individual professional journeys.

Conventional qualitative analysis typically relies on linear transcript review, which can obscure the systemic and multidimensional processes that characterise FE teaching and leadership. There is therefore a need for analytic frameworks capable of representing the networked and relational nature of professional experience and how this shapes educators' attitudes and practices.

In my PhD analysis of interview data from FE teachers and leaders, I employed a novel methodological approach combining Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) with schematic visual mapping. Emergent IPA themes were translated into visual maps foregrounding complexity and interconnection, drawing inspiration from Harry Beck's London Underground maps.

This mapping approach enabled the magnification of core experiences and the identification of convergence points for intervention across roles and career stages. Overall, the findings highlight links between wellbeing and professional purpose, expose persistent systemic ableism within FE institutions, and demonstrate the impact

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

of top-down policymaking without meaningful consultation with knowledgeable educators and leaders, particularly in relation to inclusive practice for SEND learners.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Carrie-Anne Sturt

Walking and Talking to Publication: Opening doors for PGRs

Postgraduate researchers (PGRs) are increasingly encouraged to publish during their doctoral studies, yet access to publication opportunities and meaningful authorship remains uneven and often shaped by informal academic networks. Navigating the transition from doctoral researcher to academic can therefore be both aspirational and fraught, particularly for those unfamiliar with the hidden curricula of publishing and academic collaboration.

This paper reflects on a collaborative autoethnographic 'Walk and Talk' research project undertaken by a group of PGRs here at EHU. Through collective reflection, shared writing, and dialogic analysis of our lived experiences, the project created a supportive space in which PGRs could explore academic identity, vulnerability, and authorship while engaging in a tangible route to publication. Walking and Talking functioned not only as a methodological approach but also as a pedagogical and relational practice, foregrounding reciprocity, reflexivity, and care.

The opportunity to publish only came about through a fortunate happenstance when a PGR shared the 'Walk and Talk' research project with an academic colleague from the university who was working on a book project. It was this colleague who then made the suggestion that we collectively write our research into a chapter for this prospective book.

Following discussion, the PGR team grabbed the opportunity as they considered the positive implications of becoming published in supporting their transition from student to academic. This challenges the nature of competitive research cultures and reimagines supervisory and collegial relationships as sites of inclusive academic socialisation with potential to develop and support burgeoning PGRs into professional academics creating the foundations for communities of academic practice.

Participation in this collaborative project was transformational for the PGRs, facilitating increased confidence, a sense of academic belonging, and a clearer understanding of scholarly publishing as a socially situated practice. Breaking into academic publishing

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

served as a critical threshold, enabling PGRs to re-position themselves from 'novice' researchers to emerging academics with legitimate scholarly voices.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Celyn Dibble

Developing a Community-Led Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing in Wigan

Education has a transformative power to shape life chances and make hope possible, not only for individuals but for entire communities. This presentation draws on a community-led wellbeing research project. Using a mixed-methods study that explores how community assets, lived experience, and collaborative practice contribute to mental wellbeing outcomes. By embedding realist evaluation within an applied public health context, this work highlights the voices often excluded from traditional education and wellbeing research, highlighting how educational opportunities can lead to positive social outcomes such as community connection, confidence, purpose, and resilience.

In Wigan, widening socioeconomic inequalities and mental health challenges highlight the need for approaches that involve community involvement to embrace the broader learning environments in which people live. By walking alongside participants through their neighbourhoods and exploring their experiences of community spaces, services, and activities, the research illuminates how educational, social, and community practices together shape life chances. The study captures not only what changes, but also how and why change occurs, offering context-sensitive insights into the mechanisms that enable individuals to thrive.

This research speaks directly to the conference theme, by emphasising how education, especially in areas of inequality, act as community assets. Findings will be relevant to educators, policymakers, community partners, and practitioners committed to improving life chances through shared learning, collaboration and evidence-informed practice.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Chiara Colombo

Deficit based language discourse in education policy and practice: the crafting of race and class injustice in FE colleges

Recent research has highlighted how deficit perceptions of language that privilege standardised forms of dominant language are written into education policies with negative consequences for racialised students and their teachers (Badwan, 2021; Cushing, 2023a; Rosa and Flores, 2017; Welply, 2022). This paper seeks to critically explore how discourses of linguistic deficiency are perpetrated and perpetuated in education policies in England, and how they impact upon the lived experiences of marginalised students and their teachers. From a critical perspective it is important to examine how these discourses are enacted through practice (Ball, 2012) and how they shape students' and teachers' subjectivity. Based on a literature review, this presentation will discuss scholarship which addresses the relationship between globalisation, neoliberalism and their influence on language education policy making. Building from this important context setting, the paper offers a:

- Survey of key literature which targets policy discourses of standardised English.
- Critical analysis of literature addressing surveillance of language practice in secondary schools/FE settings.
- Consideration of literature which addresses language injustices concluding by identifying gaps in knowledge and research highlighted by this review.

In addition to the above, this paper discusses some emerging findings with respect to research conducted in some FE institutions in the North West of England with a focus on ESOL. The discussion places the findings in dialogue with the critical literature review, creating a conversation between existing scholarship and new empirical data.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Christina Donovan

From sense-making to meaning-making: revisiting the research circle as a site for purposeful action in FE professional development.

This paper revisits a 2020–22 co-evaluation of APConnect, a professional development programme for Advanced Practitioners (APs) in the Further Education (FE) sector. Funded by the Education and Training Foundation and delivered by touchconsulting, our evaluation sought to disrupt traditional, performative approaches by aligning its methodology with the collaborative ethos of APConnect (touchconsulting, 2021). Using a Research Circle (RC) approach, we co-designed research questions and processes with programme designers and participants, recognising that meaningful evaluation must reflect the values and aspirations of the community it serves (Facer & Pahl, 2017). While earlier publications detail the evaluation’s findings, this paper examines the methodological significance of the RC and its potential to function as a form of professional development. Drawing on Nind et al. (2024), we show how circular research configurations open space for the emotional, relational, social and political dimensions of practice, whilst also challenging the implicit assumption that either research or professional learning is linear.

Given the limited application of RCs in educational contexts, particularly within FE, our contribution is twofold. First, we extend discussions of co-production in educational research. Second, following the work of Olsson et al. (2024), we consider RCs through the lens of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014). We analyse how the ‘sayings’, ‘doings’ and ‘relatings’ of the RC supported participants’ movement from individual sense-making to collective meaning-making as a precursor to changemaking action. We argue that the RC’s intention to generate ‘actionable knowledge’ (Holmstrand et al., 2017) enabled participants to re-imagine their roles, exercise agency and visualise alternative futures within their practice contexts

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Ciaran Murphy

A mixed-method investigation of the types of content and experiences children are encountering via smartphones in school.

This project presents a planned mixed-method investigation into the types of content and experiences children encounter via smartphones during the school day in England. Situated within a rapidly evolving policy context – where non-statutory guidance on smartphone use remains contested – the study aims to respond to growing concern about children’s exposure to harmful online material and the broader implications for wellbeing, safeguarding, and educational outcomes. Existing research highlights links between smartphone use and issues such as exposure to sexual and violent content, cyberbullying, and poor mental health, yet there is a notable lack of empirical, school-specific evidence on what children are actually experiencing in situ.

The primary aim is to address this gap by systematically exploring three key areas: the nature of content accessed by children via smartphones in school; the experiences and interactions shaped by such access; and the perceptions of students, parents, and school staff regarding smartphone presence and its impacts. The study will engage participants aged 11–21, alongside parents and educational professionals, using a sequential design comprising online questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews. By combining quantitative data on prevalence with qualitative insights into lived experiences, the project seeks to generate a comprehensive evidence base. This will enable a deeper understanding of both risks and potential benefits associated with smartphone use in schools. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform policy discussions, support evidence-based decision-making, and contribute to safeguarding practices and educational strategies that promote children’s wellbeing in increasingly digital school environments.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Claire Hawkins

Ethics, Judgement, and Choice: A Human-Centred Framework for AI Literacy in Initial Teacher Education

As generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) becomes increasingly embedded across education, there's a risk that institutional responses prioritise efficiency, skills acquisition, or technological compliance, rather than transformative education. This challenge is particularly acute in Initial Teacher Education (ITE), where students are simultaneously learners and future professionals who will shape educational values, cultures, and life chances.

This work in progress presentation introduces a human centred and inclusive AI literacy framework designed to support transformative practice in ITE. Grounded in socio constructivist perspectives on learning as dialogic, mediated, and judgement based, the framework conceptualises AI literacy as an exercise of professional agency rather than technical proficiency. Two cross cutting conditions shape all engagement with AI: (1) ethics, integrity, responsibility, and inclusion, foregrounding human in the loop decision making and sensitivity to equity and neurodiversity; and (2) judgement, critical thinking, and meta cognition, emphasising reflective evaluation of both AI use and principled non use (UNESCO, 2024; Hillman et al., 2024).

Within these conditions, three developmental strands reflect the distinctive positioning of ITE students: understanding AI; application and use of AI in academic study; and designing and using AI for teaching, learning, and assessment. The framework aligns with global human centred competency frameworks (UNESCO, 2024) while responding to higher education research on assessment redesign (Perkins et al., 2025) and empirical evidence of ambivalence, ethical concern, and uneven confidence among pre service teachers and teacher educators (Gamlem et al., 2026).

Illustrative exemplars demonstrate how the framework can be enacted. The presentation concludes by discussing how this approach supports transformative education by strengthening human agency, inclusive pedagogy, and professional judgement in AI rich educational futures.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Claire Wicher

Beyond the Pilot: What happens when learners help shape the research?

Co-design is often talked about as a way to “improve” research methods, but what happens when it actually changes the research itself?

In this talk, I'll share reflections from my doctoral research with young adults who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), taking part in a blended web development programme. As part of the study, a group of learners with lived experience were involved in shaping how the research would work. What started as a way to test and refine ideas quickly became something more significant.

Rather than simply suggesting tweaks, participants challenged some core assumptions, particularly around how identity could be explored. More structured approaches didn't resonate. Instead, they leaned towards storytelling, metaphor, and visual ways of expressing their experiences. This led to a shift in the research design, moving towards more open, flexible methods shaped by the learners themselves.

In this session, I'll share what that process looked like in practice, including examples of activities, feedback from participants, and how their input directly influenced key decisions. I'll also reflect honestly on the challenges, including managing my dual role as both tutor and researcher.

This talk will be useful for anyone working with young people or marginalised groups, particularly in education, community, or skills-based settings. It offers a practical look at how involving learners more meaningfully in research can lead to approaches that feel more relevant, inclusive, grounded in real experience, and ultimately support more positive learning journeys.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Clare Woolhouse

Unearthing treasure at 'Tideline': Re-interpreting experiences of anxiety and complex behaviour in a PRU

Over the past few years the UK Government, teachers and parents struggled to respond to children's increased levels of anxiety and complex behaviours, which has led to subsequent suspensions and exclusions from mainstream schooling and a higher demand for specialist provision (DfE, 2025). To explore a greater understanding of the situation from children's point of view, the presentation details collaborative visual methods research with children aged 11-15 attending one specialist Pupil Referral Unit as a case study.

In the research, photo-voice and photo-elicitation methods (Woolhouse & Kay, 2025) were led by the children to explore their perceptions and understandings of policy and practice in the PRU. The presentation will include anonymised images the children created and their accompanying comments to outline situations and experiences that they found challenging or confusing.

I use the pseudonym 'Tideline' Secondary as a transitional or 'in-between' place (Thomassen, 2016) and outline my use of Lefebvre's (1991) concept of space to make my analysis in three ways. Firstly, to consider the social claiming of space around agency and power. Secondly, I think through how the use of space creates boundaries and defines ownership, and finally, I explore ideas around lived embodiment. I will relate these aspects to the school environment and to the relationships between children and teachers in order to re-imagine school spaces 'otherwise' (Ahmed, 2023). The presentation will outline an example of how collaborative work that really listens and responds to children's voices and experiences can offer hope for those who are educationally marginalised.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Danielle Byatte

Reimagining Post-16 pedagogy through Visual Literacy

With approximately 83% of information now disseminated visually (Zhu & Lim, 2024), the need for learners to become visually literate “critical consumers” (Moje 2015, in Guo et al. 2024) is arguably of utmost importance. However, existing literature on Visual Literacy has often overlooked its potential as a skillset within Further Education. This study identifies curriculum areas where Visual Literacy skills can be embedded through sustainable and meaningful approaches.

A qualitative methodology was employed, involving six 16–18-year-old participants from a visual-arts A-Level course in three focus group discussions. During these sessions, participants evaluated existing visual resources before creating and sharing their own in response, evaluating the creative and academic reasoning behind their design. The findings address the contemporary learner's lived experience of visual and technological change, revealing tensions between personal creative expression and perceived educational demands prior to entering the workplace (Robinson 2006). This research calls for a balance between engaging pedagogical approaches and the need to prepare learners for employment, ultimately reframing what it means to be 'creative' in their educational context and personal development.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Danielle Vipond

From survival to sustainability: advancing teacher wellbeing in further education

Further Education (FE) is often seen as a sector that changes lives, but the well-being of the teachers who make this possible is often overlooked. Research shows that heavier workloads, pressure to perform, and ongoing funding issues are major challenges. These factors lead to increased stress, burnout, and difficulty retaining staff. Even so, most efforts to support well-being focus on helping individuals cope, rather than improving the conditions teachers face.

This presentation draws on qualitative research about the real experiences of FE teachers. It asks whether teachers are truly supported to keep going in their work, or if they are just getting by. The research shows that teachers face many demands and emotional stress and have little control over their work. Workload is just one part of a larger picture shaped by the institution's culture, expectations, and how teachers see their roles.

This presentation goes beyond simply pointing out problems. It looks at what it would take to move from simply surviving to creating real sustainability for teachers. The presentation highlights the structural and cultural changes needed to make teacher wellbeing a priority and prevent problems before they start.

Since improving life opportunities is a key goal in today's education policy, this research argues that supporting and sustaining teachers at the heart of the system is not simply a nice idea, but a must.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Dave Lewis

Inspiring Creativity in Science: Practical Approaches for the Classroom

Creativity is increasingly recognised as indispensable for young people navigating an unpredictable world, yet it remains one of the most underutilised resources in secondary school classrooms. This session draws directly on a small-scale research project conducted within a secondary science setting, exploring what happens when students are given the freedom and tools to be genuinely creative.

The project redesigned a Year 8 science scheme of work on rock formation to be more inquiry-led and student-centred, using Daud et al.'s Preparation–Imagination–Implementation–Analysis–Evaluation model as a planning framework. Students responded with enthusiasm: producing, models, posters and paintings that demonstrated both scientific understanding and creative originality. Notably, engagement and on-task behaviour improved, and students who might otherwise have disengaged from science found a meaningful entry point.

This session connects directly to the theme of resistance and compliance in school. Where traditional, content-heavy approaches can prompt disengagement or passive compliance, creative and inquiry-based tasks appear to shift student agency, inviting participation rather than demanding it. Pupil voice gathered during the project reflects this shift, with students expressing genuine enjoyment and personal connection to their learning.

The session will share practical strategies for embedding creativity into subject areas, tools for overcoming common barriers (curriculum pressure, assessment demands, teacher confidence), and a planning framework teachers can apply immediately. The session balances accessible theory, honest reflection on challenges, and hands-on collaborative discussion.

Creativity is not a luxury for the arts — it is a powerful lever for re-engaging young people who have learned to resist, or simply switched off.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

David Allan & Shereen Shaw

Changing futures: Using alternative provision to address inequality and school disengagement in England

In recent years, rates of persistent and severe absence from school in England have been significantly high, resulting in concerning levels of school exclusion. Social disadvantage has been shown to play a role in this as it can have an adverse effect on learning opportunities, leading to a rise in disaffection with compulsory learning environments and perpetuating social and educational inequalities. School disengagement thus continues to dominate the landscape. To address this, alternative provision (AP) can offer bespoke packages of learning and a deeper understanding of the difficulties many young people face. Whilst AP has demonstrated much success in a wide variety of regions, however, it remains a neglected and misunderstood area of education, overlooked by policymakers and undervalued as a valid learning pathway. This paper looks at emerging findings from an ongoing research project into AP in the north-west of England and highlights pedagogical approaches that have enabled successful re-engagement in learning. Drawing on interview data from a range of stakeholders working with young people in AP, as well as the voices of the young people themselves, we explore a variety of pedagogical approaches that have been found to have successfully addressed disaffection and disengagement. We position AP as an undervalued area of education that needs reconsideration at national policy level, and we argue that whilst some progress has been made in addressing social disadvantage through AP, many disengaged young people continue to be marginalised for their backgrounds and blamed for their (constrained) learning choices.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

David Haycock, George Aird, Karen Bloyce, Helen O’Keeffe, Andy Smith, Sarah Ward, Barnaby Sargent-Megicks and Rachel Wilcock

Embedding Mental Health and Wellbeing in Initial Teacher Education: Insights from a Primary PGCE Specialist Cohort

Mental health and wellbeing are increasingly recognised as central to teaching and are embedded across key areas of practice within the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF). Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes are also increasingly expected to prepare trainee teachers to support pupils’ mental health and wellbeing alongside academic learning. This presentation explores the perspectives of an inaugural cohort of trainees enrolled on a PGCE Primary Mental Health and Wellbeing Specialist with QTS programme at Edge Hill University. It examines their views of activities developed with contributions from Alder Hey Children’s NHS Foundation Trust and Medical Needs Education - Liverpool, intended to support the development of trainees’ knowledge, confidence, and practice in relation to mental health and wellbeing. Data were generated through four focus groups with 24 trainees, organised around four topics: trainee expectations, learning experiences, school placement application, and preparedness for employment. Early findings suggest trainees developed a more holistic understanding of mental health and wellbeing, recognising it should be embedded within all aspects of teaching practice. School placements were perceived as essential in building confidence and enabling application of evidence-based strategies in classroom contexts. Other areas of development included relationship building, communication, and responsive behaviour approaches. Trainees also indicated that greater emphasis on practical strategies and exposure to complex pupil needs would further strengthen readiness for employment as early career teachers. The findings highlight the importance of embedding mental health and wellbeing throughout ITE programmes and the value of experiential learning in developing confident, reflective trainees.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Eliot Wright

Leading Transformative Education in Post-1992 Universities: Academic Leadership during the Interregnum

Post-1992 universities in England play a significant role in providing inclusive higher education and supporting diverse student cohorts. In addition to research and research-informed teaching, these institutions have a tradition of prioritising learning and teaching. In this context, the leadership of learning and teaching is central to the transformative potential of higher education. However, universities are also operating within an increasingly complex environment shaped by regulation, performance metrics, and competing institutional priorities. This presentation draws on doctoral research exploring the leadership of learning and teaching in post-1992 universities. Using an interpretivist qualitative approach, the study involved semi-structured interviews with fifteen academic leaders across three English universities. The research investigated how leaders understand and enact their role in shaping educational environments that support high-quality teaching, student engagement, and staff development during a period of significant sectoral change.

The analysis is informed by Maxwell's (2021) Five Levels of Leadership, which provides a framework for understanding leadership as a developmental and relational process, moving from positional authority to influence grounded in trust, credibility, and the development of others. Findings suggest that effective leadership of learning and teaching relies less on formal authority and more on relational practices such as mentoring colleagues, advocating for teaching, and fostering supportive academic cultures. The presentation will outline several propositions emerging from the research regarding academic leadership in contemporary universities. Although the study is situated within a higher education context, the findings highlight leadership practices that may resonate across educational settings more broadly. The presentation therefore reflects on how relational approaches to leadership can help sustain transformative educational environments and support meaningful learning experiences for students.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Ella O'Doherty

School Mentoring for the Long Game: is sports coaching the answer?

Recent policy shifts in school mentoring have reconceptualised the training and development of trainee and early career teachers within a framework of instructional coaching. This relatively new strategy is said not only to raise achievement but also address concerns regarding teacher retention. The rationale foregrounded in guidance from professional organisations (eg Chartered College of Teachers, Ambition Institute) and signposted by the Department of Education (eg Deans for Impact) links instructional practice in education to sports coaching. Yet the theoretical implications of this emerging relationship have been largely ignored and therefore our understanding of the benefits of potential cross-disciplinary applications limited.

From a position of philosophical inquiry, this paper begins to problematise the consequences of such inter-disciplinary borrowings which are found to be selective and often outdated. Current educational discourse in mentoring, for example, focuses on replicating the technical aspects of deliberate practice but is apparently silent about the 'philosophical turn' in contemporary sports coaching scholarship which is reframing practice holistically with renewed attention to its affective dimensions. At the same time, the application of instructional coaching within the situated context of schools is framed by a performative policy agenda that mitigates against teacher wellbeing.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Gavin Davenport

Into the Woods: Rethinking Digital Risk, Adult Co-Play and the Limits of Prohibition

Governments are banning children from social media in the name of safety. But is prohibition actually protection, or does it simply transfer the blame for harm onto children as rule-breakers, while relieving adults of the harder work of accompaniment? This session challenges the conflation of risk with harm that drives current policy (boyd, 2014; Orben and Przybylski, 2019), and explores what a genuinely educational response to digital risk might look like in practice. Drawing on risky play theory (Brussoni et al., 2015), digital risky play research (Mensonides et al., 2024) and Foucault, this session aims to discuss implications for policy and practice.

The session considers questions like why we define age limits differently for film and games, with implications for adult engagement in youth experience, and how far the identity of educators as digital humans is allowed to manifest within the professional world.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

George Aird

Who's asking whether it works? Universities, The Hub for Evaluation of Applied Education and Innovation, and the evidence gap in education

Education is being transformed at pace. The Lifelong Learning Entitlement promises to reshape access to higher education through modular, flexible provision. Generative AI has moved from novelty to near-universality among students, with 95% now reporting some form of use (Stephenson and Armstrong, 2026). Yet amid this transformation, a critical question is rarely asked: does any of this actually improve life chances, and for whom?

The evidence base is problematic. On microcredentials and on-demand modular learning, most activity has been supply-side, with limited evidence of genuine learner or employer demand for the provision being created (WonkHE, 2022) (WonkHE, 2024). On AI, there exist large risks that unexamined adoption becomes a new vector for educational inequality (HEPI, 2026). Indeed, HEPI has called explicitly for institutions to establish systematic evaluation programmes to understand AI's impact on student outcomes.

This presentation argues that hope in education must be evidenced to be realised. It introduces the Hub for Evaluation of Applied Education and Innovation (HEAEI): a model for embedded evaluation infrastructure designed to evaluate education in partnership with practitioners — not research it from a distance — and to make easier the pathway from theory to practice.

Drawing on recent examples, including a partnership with Lancashire Colleges focused on interventions for at-risk NEET learners, and collaborations supporting internal researchers to translate their work into evaluated practice, the presentation asks what a new relationship between universities, research and evidence might look like, and what it could offer the wider sector.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Georgina Roberts

Feel the connection: Creative approaches for supporting parent-infant relationships

This workshop introduces an arts therapies-informed framework designed to support parent-infant relationships. Grounded in doctoral research exploring music therapy, art therapy, and dance movement psychotherapy, the framework translates relational principles into practical, accessible approaches for practitioners working with families. The session focuses on how small, moment-to-moment interactions, shaped through pacing, attention, and presence, can strengthen connection and support early relational development. These early interactions are foundational for emotional regulation, communication, and later learning, aligning with the conference theme of improving life chances through education.

Participants will engage in a series of short experiential activities using sound, movement, and mark-making. These activities are not presented as techniques but as invitations to explore relational processes such as attunement, co-regulation, and shared attention. Through guided reflection, participants will be encouraged to notice how their own responses, pacing, and stance influence interaction.

The workshop emphasises professional reflexivity, supporting practitioners to recognise how their presence shapes relational experiences. Participants will leave with an understanding of how creative, embodied approaches can be integrated into everyday practice to support connection, engagement, and early relational wellbeing.

This session is suitable for educators, early years practitioners, and those working with families.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Gill Holden

Nurturing wellbeing: Supporting the mental and emotional health and wellbeing of children, staff and families in the early years

The National Children's Bureau's Early Childhood Programme Lead will provide an overview of a new training package developed for all those working with young children. The training looks at supporting the mental and emotional health and wellbeing of children, staff, and families.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Heather Marshall & Rhonwen Bruce

From tokenism to transformation: preparing trainee teachers to embed diversity in the curriculum

Despite increasing emphasis on diversity in education, curriculum approaches often remain tokenistic, positioning 'diverse content' as an addition rather than a fundamental rethinking of knowledge, values and representation. This session explores how teacher education can move beyond superficial inclusion, instead equipping trainee teachers to engage in meaningful, transformative curriculum design.

Drawing on practice from secondary Religious Education and History PGCE programmes, we examine how trainees are supported to critically engage with concepts of diversity, lived worldviews and ethical reflection. The session will outline how adaptive teaching, curriculum interrogation and subject-specific pedagogy are used to challenge dominant narratives and centre marginalised perspectives in authentic and sustainable ways across different subject disciplines.

We will share examples of trainee-led curriculum development in both RE and History, highlighting the opportunities and tensions involved in moving beyond tokenistic approaches. This includes consideration of how trainees negotiate institutional constraints, curriculum expectations and their own developing subject knowledge when addressing contested or sensitive content.

Participants will be invited to reflect on their own contexts and consider practical strategies for embedding diversity as a core principle of curriculum design, rather than an 'add-on'. The session contributes to discussions on teacher education and transformative practice, offering insights applicable across subjects and phases.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Helen Maddison-Neill

Do students in Higher Education who present with Dyslexia have a sense of belonging?

The number of students with a declared disability in higher education (HE) has increased significantly in recent years (HESA, 2025; Williams et al., 2019). As an inclusive institution, our ethos is grounded in widening participation, supporting diversity, and promoting equality. Under the Equality Act 2010, HE providers have a duty to anticipate the needs of disabled students and implement appropriate adjustments. This aligns with the social model of disability, which emphasises the need to remove environmental and attitudinal barriers rather than “fix” the individual, ideally without requiring disclosure. However, this model remains aspirational in practice (Williams et al., 2019), highlighting the need for more inclusive approaches (DfE, 2015).

Within UK HE, students with dyslexia continue to experience lower academic attainment than their non-dyslexic peers and face challenges relating to identity, stigma, and disclosure (Eccles-Padwick, 2024). Research by Hamilton Clark (2024) suggests that institutional perceptions of dyslexia significantly influence students' identity formation and sense of belonging. When dyslexia is framed as a deficit or its legitimacy is questioned, students may experience reduced self-esteem and confidence, often leading to selective disclosure as a strategy to manage stigma.

This Master's research explores the extent to which undergraduate students with a formal diagnosis of dyslexia experience a sense of belonging in HE. It examines prior educational experiences, conceptualisations of belonging, and the impact of dyslexia on self-esteem (Burden, 2008). Using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), the study aims to identify key patterns in student experiences to inform more inclusive and responsive institutional practices.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Helena Knapton & Yvonne Cashmore

The role of a professional association: introducing a Senior Fellowship scheme within the Economics, Business and Enterprise Association (EBEA)

In the midst of the changing expectations in the sector, from the Department of Education (DfE), Ofsted, the Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR), the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) etc. and continuing endorsement of evidence-based practice there has been a quiet revival for subject specific pedagogy within effective Continuing Professional Development (CPD). For our subject areas of Economics and Business, the shift towards evidence-based practice is both a welcome development and a systemic challenge. Welcome as it promotes the effective delivery of these subjects. A challenge too, as Economics and Business are sometimes taught by non-specialists and there is a limited subject specific evidence-base compared to core subjects.

The presentation introduces the Economics and Business Association (EBEA) Senior Fellowship scheme, a strategic intervention designed to bridge this gap. Grounded in a national teacher survey that identified 8 core areas of need, the scheme empowers members to undertake a project in one of these areas which would enhance the subject specific evidence-base in that topic and be disseminated to the wider community.

This presentation is designed for teachers, mentors and teacher educators providing an opportunity to investigate and discuss the role of professional associations and how they can build a community of practice, elevate professional identity and support evidence-based curriculum design, disseminating specialist knowledge to the wider teaching community.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Ian Shirley & Anna Mariguddi

Use of pre-packaged digital resources in primary music education

In this presentation, Dr Ian Shirley and Dr Anna Mariguddi report on a study which aims to generate increased understanding of how teachers use pre-packaged digital resources (PPDRs) in primary school music education. Drawing on national responses to an online survey, the researchers will report on the opportunities, challenges, limitations, aspirations and implementation experiences of those working with online pre-packaged digital music education resources. Consideration will be given to the implications for practice, and for ongoing professional development, both in primary music, and across the wider primary curriculum.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

James Turner

Narrative synthesis of coach wellbeing: implications for coach education

Sports coaches play a critical role in shaping young people's developmental experiences in sport, positively influencing not only performance outcomes but also emotional wellbeing, long-term physical activity and wider health outcomes (Côté et al., 2014). As such, the wellbeing of coaches becomes a pivotal yet underexplored factor in the quality and sustainability of youth sport environments. Research suggests that reduced coach wellbeing negatively affects relational behaviours and the capacity to foster positive development (Frost et al., 2024). This narrative review aims to explore how coach wellbeing has been defined and positioned in relation to coaching practice. From the thematic synthesis of the literature three main themes emerge. First, professionalisation and performance: increasing professionalisation has heightened expectations and accountability, placing greater psychological demands on coaches. Second, wellbeing in coach education: although coach education is positioned as a key mechanism to support coach wellbeing (particularly when coaches are regarded as adult learners), wellbeing principles often remain peripheral in practice. Third, role conflict: competing demands create role conflict, with coaches expected to deliver performance outcomes while maintaining practice that optimises wellbeing, often without sufficient support. These findings suggest that without greater alignment between performance expectations and wellbeing protection, coach education risks reinforcing the very conditions that compromise coach wellbeing and limit the maintenance of supportive environments. This synthesis, therefore, argues for coach wellbeing to be prioritised as a foundational component of coach education, to better support both coach workforce sustainability and gain greater positive outcomes for youth development.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Jane Calcutt

Leading with Care: Reflections on the First Year of a QTS Postgraduate Pathway with a Mental Health and Wellbeing Specialism

This presentation reflects on my first year of leading a Postgraduate QTS pathway specialising in mental health and wellbeing. It begins by outlining the rationale for embedding a mental health specialism within initial teacher education, drawing on increasing evidence of need among children, young people and the school workforce. The session argues that mental health is not an addition to teacher education, but a foundational component of effective, ethical and inclusive practice. The presentation will then describe how the pathway content was carefully designed utilising the eight principles of the Whole School Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing (Department for Education, 2025) to meet all QTS requirements while maintaining a clear and explicit focus on mental health and wellbeing. Key curriculum decisions will be shared, illustrating how statutory expectations were aligned with trauma informed practice, safeguarding, inclusion, and relational pedagogy.

A working definition of mental health in education will be explored, alongside an examination of what postgraduate trainee teachers need to know: boundaries of professional responsibility, early identification, inclusive classroom strategies and partnership working beyond the school. Challenges encountered, including trainee confidence, assessment tensions and emotional labour, will be discussed alongside successes such as strong student engagement and the development of external professional links through collaboration with Alder Hey Children's Hospital.

Finally, the presentation will outline planned research for democratic programme evaluation, utilising student voice to explore lived experiences of the pathway. This includes intended qualitative methods designed to position students as co-constructors of knowledge, ensuring the pathway continues to evolve responsively and ethically.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Janet Fairclough, Katie Molyneux, Declan Heron & Katherine Fagan

From Barriers to Belonging - Considering University Pathways for Mature Learners.

For adults returning to education, the journey onto degree study is often not a decision taken lightly. It can be shaped by competing responsibilities, disrupted educational histories, and a persistent sense of not quite belonging in a higher education environment. However, if universities design pathways that recognise these realities, they create opportunities for transformation and new life chances.

The proposed presentation will bring together three interconnected experiences: the programme manager overseeing a long running university led Access to HE-style initiative; an academic who both teaches on the access programme and later supports these learners on their degree courses; and former mature students who progressed through the programme into successful undergraduate study. Together, they will explore how programme design, relevant teaching practices, and learner centred support can dismantle barriers and cultivate genuine belonging for adult learners.

The session will examine:

- the challenges mature learners face when considering higher education
- the design principles behind a successful, university embedded access programme
- how academic support — from access course to degree — strengthens confidence, identity, and progression
- lived experiences from former students illustrating the programme's impact on their lives and futures.

By focusing on strategic insight, pedagogical practice, and authentic learner narratives, this presentation will demonstrate how widening participation pathways can transform life experiences.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Jo Albin-Clark, Nathan Archer, Alicia Blanco-Bayo, Isabella Ditta,
Helen Dunn, Rebecca Green, Laura Gregory, Victoria Jefferies, Ellie Murray, Katie Smith
& Jen Swift

Spilling the tea: What happens when we tell resistance stories about enabling children's right to play?

The subject of this workshop is our two-year Resistance Stories research project that studied how educators' pushback on the marginalisation of children's right to play in early childhood education (ECEC) settings. By opening invitations for participants to tell stories about how they enable play to happen, we were interested in the everyday materialities, spaces and places that had a role as part of ecologies of practice. Our study joins in scholarship that troubles why adult led teaching might be prioritised to the detriment of child-led play through demand associated with curricula policy, assessment pressures, and inspection cultures (Albin-Clark and Archer, 2023; Archer and Albin-Clark, 2022; Albin-Clark, Archer and Chesworth 2025; Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021).

Our workshop is designed to be a practical space inspired by the idea of 'spilling the tea', a playful term that involves sharing truth telling. This will take the form of a practical and collage-based participant led activity where participants draw or write their resistance story with an emphasis on the embodied complexities of such acts. Participants will be asked to share stories and join in with questions on ideas related to the right to play, how play happens and what resistance or subversion it might require. Through this dialogue, we hope to look at the moments and movements of resistance to tease out the roots, complexities and consequences of enacting play and what is hopeful about truth telling and the sharing of stories. In creating conditions for collaboration and creativity, we notice how sensorial and emotional are related to resistance acts in moments that could support wider resistance movements with an aim to promote flourishing pedagogies for research but also to celebrate how play is already thriving in schools and settings.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Joe Rose

More than the lesson: Building trust to unlock student potential in alternative education

This presentation explores the critical role of trust, relationships, and mutual respect in engaging secondary-aged students, particularly those at risk of disengagement from mainstream education. Drawing on experience within Wigan Athletic Community Trust's secondary education provision, it will highlight how relationship-led practice can significantly impact student motivation, behaviour and overall outcomes.

For many young people, especially those facing social, emotional or behavioural challenges, education is not solely shaped by curriculum content, but by how safe, understood and valued they feel within a learning environment. Each person in the room will no doubt have had their own unique experiences as a student, where positive relationships with staff directly influenced their engagement and success. The aim is to connect these experiences to current practice working with young people, particularly those most vulnerable.

The presentation will outline simple, practical strategies used to build trust, including consistency, authenticity, active listening and adapting approaches to meet individual needs. It will also consider the importance of recognising each student's context and barriers to learning, reinforcing the idea that respect is earned through understanding, not authority alone.

Attendees will gain insight into how small, intentional actions can create a culture of trust that enables students to re-engage with education and achieve their potential. The session aims to share realistic, transferable considerations that educators can implement within their own settings, particularly when working with students who may be hardest to reach.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Julie Ainsworth

Bibliotherapy: Equipping children with the tools to process big emotions

This presentation provides an introduction to the history of Bibliotherapy, how it fits with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and possible applications for schools and other settings.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Karen Ludke

Language Learning Through the Arts: Adolescents' Perspectives of Music, Visual Art and Drama Activities

There is growing evidence that arts-based approaches, including music, visual art and drama activities, can support additional language (L2) learning. However, relatively little is known about how adolescent learners themselves perceive these approaches, despite their potential to positively influence engagement, L2 learning motivation, and longer-term educational trajectories. This study addresses that gap by exploring adolescents' perspectives of arts-integrated L2 learning in classroom contexts. Qualitative interview data were collected from 45 English-speaking adolescents in Scotland following participation in L2 French lessons that incorporated music and songs vs. visual art and drama activities over a 6-week period. The transcribed interviews were analysed using a content analysis approach. Findings suggest that the arts-based approaches were enjoyable for adolescents and led to positive emotions, reductions in L2 learning anxiety, and supported vocabulary memorisation, listening, speaking, and pronunciation skills. The activities also encouraged participation among adolescent L2 learners who may feel less confident in traditional classroom settings. By foregrounding learners' voices, this research contributes to our understanding of how arts-integrated pedagogies may support language development in a classroom setting. It aligns with broader educational goals of improving life chances through inclusive, engaging, and meaningful L2 learning experiences. Implications for classroom practice and future research are discussed.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Katherine Birch

Supporting Care Experienced Students to Thrive in Education and Employment: Lessons and Insights from across Cheshire & Merseyside

This presentation by the Director of Alder Hey Academy explores the innovative work they are doing to support care experienced students.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Kathryn Morris

School Readiness Targets or System Readiness? Rethinking Accountability for Early Childhood Outcomes

School readiness is widely recognised as a predictor of later educational attainment, wellbeing, and life course outcomes. In England, readiness is commonly operationalised through the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) and the benchmark of a Good Level of Development (GLD). While recent policy ambitions to increase GLD attainment have focused attention and resources, they also risk framing readiness as an individual child attribute and locating accountability primarily with parents. This deficit oriented framing overlooks the powerful influence of families, early years provision, health, and community systems.

This paper presents evidence from Better Start Blackpool, a place based, system building initiative working from pregnancy to school entry in a context of high deprivation. Using Appreciative Inquiry and improvement science, we examined how multi agency collaboration within Blackpool's School Readiness Partnership enables shared responsibility for readiness across early years settings, schools, health services, family hubs, and community organisations. A full day Appreciative Inquiry workshop with cross sector stakeholders generated insights into enabling conditions for collaboration, moments of impact, constraints, and future actions.

Findings highlight thirteen strengths underpinning effective collaboration, including a safe space for dialogue, shared ownership, consistent messaging, and a sustained focus on children and families. Exemplars of impact included co designed school readiness resources and a multi agency marketplace event that demonstrated collective efficacy. Participants emphasised the importance of local agency, including the ability to decline poor fit national programmes in favour of bespoke, place responsive solutions.

The paper argues for reframing accountability from 'school readiness' to 'system readiness', positioning the child as the beneficiary rather than the bearer of responsibility. This approach offers a principled and practical route to more equitable early development outcomes and has relevance for policy, practice, and research across early childhood systems.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Katie Hazel

A Comfort Blanket and a Classroom: Television, Chronic Pain, and Hope

This paper explores television drama as a form of public pedagogy, examining how popular media functions as an informal educational space that shapes understanding, empathy, and hope. Drawing on *Waterloo Road* and *Call the Midwife* as case studies, the paper argues that media can both validate lived experience and cultivate emotional resilience in ways that formal education often does not.

The portrayal of endometriosis in *Waterloo Road* is analysed as an example of experiential learning through narrative. While not reflective of my own chronic pain condition, the storyline created a strong sense of recognition, demonstrating how media can foster what is termed “empathetic transfer” across differing lived experiences. This raises critical questions about media’s potential to challenge ableist attitudes and whether such representations could act as informal interventions in workplaces and communities.

In contrast, *Call the Midwife* is explored as a site of hope and emotional sustenance. Beyond representation, the series functions as a form of affective pedagogy, modelling care, compassion, and social justice while offering viewers a framework for processing difficulty. For the author, the programme operates as a form of mediated wellbeing, providing comfort and reinforcing the possibility of positive change.

Together, these examples position television drama as a powerful yet under-recognised educational tool - one that not only informs but transforms, contributing to improved life chances by enabling audiences to feel seen and to imagine hope.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Keisha-Ann Stewart

Resistance and Resilience: Black Caribbean Male Students' Responses to Reading

This study explores Black Caribbean male students' perceptions and experiences of the Key Stage 4 literature curriculum in England. While the formal curriculum prioritises canonical works, participants' independent reading preferences, such as Manga and texts by Black authors, reflect alternative literary engagements shaped by peer and familial networks. Positioned within Critical Race Theory, the research explores students' navigation of the racialised structures embedded within the curriculum. The study interrogates the Eurocentric characteristic of the KS4 literature curriculum, which often excludes perspectives aligned with marginalised students' realities. Although this disconnect can reinforce deficit narratives of disengagement, findings reveal participants actively engaging with canonical and non-canonical texts as sites of identity construction, critique and resistance (Gillborn, 2024; Ladson-Billings, 2021). Engagements with texts prompt reflections on race, class, gender, and double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903), while independent reading offers affirming counter-narratives (Delgado, 1989).

Methodologically, the study employs participatory narrative interviews supported by multimodal activities within a cultural heterotopic framework (Foucault, 1986; Woolhouse, 2017). This approach fosters critical reflection, reduces power imbalances, and enables participants to construct and articulate their own narratives. Findings highlight Black Caribbean male students' agency through selective engagement with stories that reflect their identities and lived experiences. Their reading practices function as forms of cultural resistance, challenging dominant literary norms while redefining constructions of Black manhood and academic engagement (Curry, 2017; Delgado and Stefancic, 2023; Yosso, 2005). Ultimately, the study positions literature as a site of marginalisation and a powerful space of resilience, identity formation, and transformative educational practice.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Kerry Moakes

Interspecies care as alternative education: Exploring possibilities for mutual flourishing

Increasing attention has been given to young people's mental health needs (DHSC, 2025). At the same time, there has been a rise in alternative educational provision (House of Commons, 2026), offering more flexible and responsive educational environments. Green care approaches (Galardi et al., 2021), particularly those involving animals in farm-based and therapeutic settings, represent one such response (Gorman, 2019). This paper examines how caring for animals operates as an educational and therapeutic practice within a third-sector setting. Drawing on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork, including images, observations, interviews, and reflective writing, I use an ethics of care framework (Noddings, 2013) to explore how interspecies relationships are enacted in everyday life. Taking snippets of data that focus on affective and embodied encounters between young people and rescued animals, the analysis shows how caring relations organise the rhythms and interactions of the setting. These findings suggest that collaboration in education can be understood as an interspecies, relational process—one that is not limited to human actors alone. This presentation argues that human–animal alternative education can open up possibilities for mutual flourishing, whilst also revealing tensions and constraints that shape their sustainability. In doing so, it reconceptualises collaboration beyond human-centred notions of community and contributes to debates on creative, relational approaches to education that support the wellbeing of young people who experience barriers to mainstream provision

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Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Laura Gregory (Edge Hill University), Denise Wright (Liverpool City Council), Nicola Parker (Knowsley Start for Life and Beyond), Karen Nock & Beth Hughes (Wigan Council) & Louise Cheetham (Sefton Council)

Reviewing the Impact of Family Hubs: working together to give children the best start in life

Representatives from Knowsley, Sefton, Liverpool and Wigan Local Authority share the transformative work that they are undertaking to support children and families through the Family Hub agenda. The pane will then take questions from the audience.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Lauren Mura

From Industry to FE Teaching: First-Year Insights from the Gatsby Industry Associates Programme

The Industry Associates Programme was established to address persistent recruitment and retention challenges in further education (FE) by creating a structured, high-quality pathway for industry professionals to transition into teaching. This presentation provides an interim evaluation of the programme's first year, focusing on design principles, implementation across five FE colleges, and emerging outcomes for participants, institutions, and partners.

Led through a collaboration between the Gatsby Foundation, the Department for Education, and Edge Hill University, the programme integrates employment-based teacher training with sector specific curriculum co-design, and targeted professional development. In its first year, the programme recruited industry associates from priority vocational areas, supporting them to develop professional identity as FE teachers while maintaining strong links to their industry expertise.

Drawing on mixed-methods data—including participant reflections, staff feedback, programme evaluation data, and institutional case studies—this presentation highlights early evidence of impact. Key findings include positive progression into teaching roles, increased confidence in pedagogical practice, and strengthened employer–college relationships. The paper also explores challenges encountered in year one, such as balancing industry expectations with teaching demands, supporting participants with limited prior educational experience, and embedding consistent mentoring practices across diverse institutional contexts.

The presentation concludes by identifying key refinements made during the first year and outlines potential priorities for the next phase, including scalability, sustainability, and alignment with national workforce strategies.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Lee Cooper

Constructing the “Complex Child” De-Constructing the crisis model of short breaks

The Context: A System in Crisis

Following the austerity policies of the Conservative government a United Nations enquiry found there had been “systemic violations” of the right of people with disabilities in the UK (United Nations 2016). UK families in poverty raising disabled children experienced the steepest drop in access to therapies, education support, social care and benefits, compared to other countries across Europe (Horridge et al 2019). Disability Rights Groups have warned the Labour Government that there is simply “nothing left to cut” (Disabled Peoples Organization Forum 2022). Despite this warning, the Government are moving ahead with plans to cut billions from disability benefits which will send hundreds of thousands into poverty, and many more into deeper poverty (Citizens Advice Bureau 2025)

Oswin (1984) asked; how far are disabled children always the cause of family problems or do professionals tend to scapegoat them to sidestep deeper social issues?

When social care routinely separates disabled children from families at point of crisis, is this the system managing the symptoms of its own failure?

But what if the crisis is not always caused by the child’s “complexity”?

What if the crisis is caused by the system’s complexity?

Through reflection on scenario-based case studies and an exploration of current literature, legislation and processes around separation, as a result of systematic failure, we explore this issue.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Leon Fraser, Susie Marriott & Andrew Billington

From Access to Empowerment: Implementing Inclusive Practices in HE

Creating inclusive classrooms within Higher Education (HE) has become a central focus of contemporary pedagogical practice, supported by extensive cognitive and educational research. Current literature consistently demonstrates that students achieve more effectively when teaching approaches acknowledge and respond to diverse needs, cultural backgrounds, and prior learning experiences. Recent work, including Altes et al. (2024), highlights that meaningful progress in inclusive education depends on strong collaboration between academic staff and their institutions, reinforced by ongoing scholarly inquiry into how educators interpret and implement inclusive principles.

Research on inclusive teaching makes clear that genuine inclusion extends beyond the application of isolated strategies; instead, it requires a sustained commitment to rethinking traditional teaching norms and addressing the structural barriers that limit student engagement and success. This emphasis aligns closely with sector-wide policy developments, as universities increasingly mandate transparent learning outcomes, equitable assessment and course policies, and accessible learning materials that meet institutional and national standards for inclusion and disability support.

In practice, HE institutions are witnessing a shift away from passive, lecture dominated instruction toward more structured, active learning approaches even in large lecture settings. Evidence shows that inclusive lecturing practices, such as fostering positive lecturer–student relationships, presenting content with clarity, and incorporating interactive learning moments, contribute significantly to students' sense of belonging and enhance outcomes across diverse student groups. The growing implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) frameworks further reflects this shift, ensuring that teaching materials are accessible, varied, and available in advance to support meaningful engagement.

This presentation examines the literature underpinning these developments and explores how both theoretical frameworks and practical tools such as S. Marriott's Inclusive Classroom Template can support inclusion before, during, and after large

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

lectures. It highlights the cultural and pedagogical shifts required to address persistent challenges, including disengagement, inaccessible resources, and uniform teaching approaches, and emphasises the collective benefits for staff and students alike.

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Liz Molyneux

Problematizing graduate earnings: A poststructural policy analysis of the new TEF

This presentation offers a critical policy analysis of the proposed future Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) metric that would regulate universities according to graduates' earnings three years after completing their studies (Office for Students, 2025). Using Bacchi and Goodwin's (2016) What's the Problem Represented to Be? (WPR) approach, I demonstrate how this proposal frames graduate earnings as a problem of teaching quality in higher education. This problem representation is underpinned by several deep-seated assumptions: that the purpose of higher education is income maximisation; that teaching quality has a valid and measurable impact on future earnings; and that students operate according to the tenets of rational choice theory in seeking the highest financial return on investment from their degree. This analysis draws attention to issues which are silenced in this problem representation including structural labour market constraints, students' diverse motivations for study and work, and the wider policy context implicated in rising student debt. It also identifies significant discursive, subjectification, and lived effects. Measuring higher education quality through earnings leads to further commodification, narrowing its purpose to labour market utility, and positioning students as workers whose value is reducible to salary. Universities, in turn, face intensified pressure to steer graduates toward high-paying employment in 'bullshit jobs' (Graeber, 2018) regardless of their interests, wellbeing, or community ties. A higher education sector which adopts the TEF earnings metric uncritically risks limiting, rather than enhancing, students' life chances.

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Lyndsey Simpson & Charlotte Sutton

Lancashire MIND: Children and Young People Services

We will highlight the work of Children and Young People's services at Lancashire Mind and, in particular, highlight the positive impact of a whole school approach to mental health developed through the Resilient Minds programme.

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Maria Volynchuk

Montessori-constructivist synthesis: insights into epistemology and early years teaching practice

Given the notable focus on constructivism in the field of education, this study (poster) aims to bridge the gap in comparative analyses between Montessori's epistemological and pedagogical implications and constructivist theory. This is achieved through secondary research on relevant academic literature that explores the Montessori philosophical and practical framework in relation to the theory of constructivism. First, the Montessori approach is examined through the lens of eclectic epistemologies, including the constructivist one, with further explanation of their theoretical foundations. Then, drawing on the above findings, early years teaching implementations are considered, illustrating overarching principles shared by Montessori and constructivist practical learning approaches.

This comparative analysis reinforces Montessori pedagogical methodologies within early childhood settings, highlighting their alignment with constructivist theories. It will also inform Montessori and non-Montessori practitioners, as well as other education professionals, of the interconnections between what can be regarded as progressive and transformative practices within early years learning environments. Finally, this study provides insights into the framework of epistemologies that individuals interested in the philosophy of education may find beneficial.

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Marie Caslin, Karlla Birchnell, Sarah Spoor & Nathan, Tony, Chloe, Marcin, Jack, Lilly, Dean, Luke, Emily, Chloe and Charlie

'Don't lock us out, don't lock us in' young disabled people's experiences of navigating the world of work

Young disabled people are likely to encounter numerous barriers during their transitions from school, especially when accessing the workplace. During this interactive workshop you will have the opportunity to hear directly from Sandfield Park special school students who will share their experiences of Supported Internships. Whilst this programme provides a vital opportunity for young disabled people challenges remain including attitudinal barriers, lack of funding and support, accessible transport and long-term employment opportunities. To highlight both the barriers and opportunities encountered when accessing the world of work, the students have written a song which they will perform.

We advocate for the development of a more inclusive society where all young people can thrive. To achieve this, we need to move away from a deficit understanding of difference and instead challenge the normative expectations of how bodies/minds should function. We also need to recognise the burden that is placed on both young people and educators to find solutions for structural inequalities. The current government have made clear their concerns surrounding the perceived economic inactivity of young people yet not enough consideration is given to the position of young disabled people.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Michelle Blake

Hoping for what? Autistic young people, post-16 transition, and conatus

Hope, as an educational value, is rarely interrogated. Discourses of improving life chances proceed as though the shape of a good life is self-evident — as though independence, economic productivity, and normative social participation are neutral aspirations rather than culturally specific ones, produced through particular assumptions about what it means to be a successful human subject.

This presentation draws on doctoral research exploring the experiences and priorities of autistic young people during the transition to post-16 education. Using an interpretative phenomenological methodology informed by new materialist ontology and critical autism studies frameworks, the research centred young people's own accounts of what mattered to them and why.

The findings challenge foundational assumptions embedded in transition policy and practice. Drawing on Braidotti's concept of conatus — the drive of each being to persist and thrive in its own configuration — I argue that current approaches to post-16 transition are structured around a normative subject that many autistic young people are not, and were never going to be. Transition frameworks have asked how ready a young person is for independence, a question epistemologically rooted in a model of human development that mistakes neurotypical subject formation for a universal trajectory.

The research suggests that autistic young people's priorities cluster around safety, belonging, and the conditions for sense-making — an expanded and politically serious account of need that current provision routinely fails to address. Reframing transition support around conatus rather than conformity does not lower expectations. It raises them — toward something neuro-affirming and genuinely worth hoping for.

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Michelle Forder, Charlotte Hardman & Lisa Ball

Deep Listening: Child Health in Wigan Borough

Children and young people's life chances are shaped by the environments, relationships, and opportunities around them. In Wigan, a large-scale Deep Listening project was commissioned to understand lived experiences, particularly among those facing the greatest inequalities, and to ensure these voices inform system change.

Over 500 children and young people were engaged across schools, community and youth settings using creative, face to face, and digital approaches to support inclusive participation. Co-design was central, with young people shaping the questions and focus of the work.

Findings highlighted both strengths, including relationships, activities and feeling heard, and challenges such as anxiety, exclusion and safety concerns.

This work has informed a more systematic understanding of child health and the development of a borough-wide Deep Listening framework. The framework embeds continuous listening across education, health and community systems, ensuring children, young people and families shape decisions. It strengthens inclusive engagement and creates clear pathways from lived experience to action, supporting more equitable outcomes and improved life chances.

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Nicola Pearce

Exploring early childhood educators' understanding, experience, and enactments of risky play pedagogies.

The term 'risky play' is both a pedagogical concept and a form of practice. Play is often defined as risky based on characteristics of 'how' or 'where' children play and has been characterised as joyful, thrilling and exciting play at heights, with speed, or using additional implements such as tools. In early childhood education in England, a myriad of nuances and tensions in implementation of such pedagogies mean that risky play doesn't always neatly fit the requirements or demands of the mainstream educational system and such practices are most commonly found in specific, and often largely commoditised forms of provision, such as within Forest School sessions and Outdoor Play and Learning schemes.

There is an emergent body of literature that offers new thinking about risky play pedagogies, particularly how they relate to healthy child development and the needs of 21st century learners. This includes a focus on how to facilitate these methodologies ethically and effectively with some level of assurance in the pedagogy and process and showing awareness of the need for stringent risk assessment and the preventative nature of safety regulations.

With an aim to foster risk tolerance in schools, challenge cultural norms and institutional responses to risk in children's play, and explore novel methods for overcoming policy barriers and fear of liability in schools; I suggest that risky play pedagogies may offer a way to approach educational reform to address societal and global changes and the immediate needs of both children and the educators that care for them.

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Philippa Holloway, Emily Lovett, Ivy Harris & Matthew Stephens

What's the point of a PhD? Experiences of postgraduate research from industry and academia and the role of the supervisor

Recent studies show that despite a downturn in academic job opportunities traditionally perceived as the goal for doctoral candidates, the value of studying for and achieving a PhD remains positively perceived across four main domains: career value; skills value; social value; personal value (Bryan & Guccione, 2018; Alves, Lopes, Cruz-Correia & Menezes, 2025). This panel of academics, aspiring PhD candidates, and PhD graduates working beyond academia will explore the benefits and potential costs of doctoral study. The session will end with participatory activities addressing some of the ways doctoral study contributes to a wider positive identity change.

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Rachel Wilcock & Dave Haycock

Evaluating a Sport-Based Resilience Program for Young Sport Participants: The Challenge Pilot UK

The Challenge Pilot UK was an interactive sport psychology workshop delivered onsite to young sport participants aged 12–18 across England, Scotland, and Ireland. It introduced six core resilience skills through engaging activities and videos, aiming to foster open conversations about resilience and encourage ongoing practice via The Challenge app. This study evaluated the initial psychological outcomes and participant experiences post-intervention. Delivered by Rugby League Cares (RL Cares), Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH), and the Gaelic Players Association (GPA), the program engaged participants from academy and community sports clubs. Participants completed validated psychological measures pre-and-post-workshop, assessing resilience, well-being, social support, strengths use, and psychological skill application. A sub-sample participated in focus groups exploring their views and experiences of the workshop and its impact on their ongoing skill use. The participants reported improvements in self-talk and emotional control and promising evidence that engaging in the programme could improve participants resilience. They appreciated the facilitators and the workshop's interactive nature. Participants clearly saw the value in working on psychological skills; however, feedback suggested covering six skills within a 60–90-minute session was overwhelming, and engagement with the accompanying app was limited. The findings varied across the different delivery contexts and participants backgrounds highlighting a need for more tailored approaches and longer-term coaching with opportunities to practice and receive support over multiple weeks.

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Richard Arnold-Lewis

Current National and International Perspectives on Mature Students

This presentation shares my current research into the evolving landscape of mature students in higher education, drawing on both UK data and international comparisons. Mature learners – defined in the UK as 21+ for undergraduate study and 25+ for postgraduate routes – represent a significant and growing proportion of those entering higher education through alternative pathways. Yet their participation, continuation and outcomes remain uneven. As highlighted in recent UK figures, “84 percent continuation rate compared with 92% for younger students” and “70% achieved 1st or 2:1 compared with 80% of younger students,” signalling persistent structural challenges.

My research examines these trends alongside global patterns identified by UNESCO and European policy frameworks, including the finding that mature learners are “more likely to be female” and that participation “declines with age.” I explore how different national systems, particularly the Nordic countries, shape access through contrasting tuition models and financial support structures.

The presentation also considers the barriers mature students face, such as financial pressures, caring responsibilities, digital exclusion and experiences of discrimination, drawing on theoretical perspectives from Bourdieu, Reay, Rawls, hooks and Fraser to illuminate how these challenges can reproduce symbolic violence within higher education.

Finally, I outline emerging solutions and policy directions, including flexible provision, expanded recognition of prior learning, and more inclusive institutional practices. My aim is to contribute to ongoing discussions about equity, participation and the future of adult learning by situating mature students within both national debates and international policy movements.

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Sally-Anne Brown & Victoria Holmes

Creating musical opportunities for young children and their families.

Note Weavers CIC is an Early Years music organisation based in the North West of England which seeks to support, collaborate with and empower anyone who works musically with young children and their families in our region and beyond. We will offer a combination of:

- presentation (30 mins),
- practical workshop (45/50 mins)
- Q and A (10/15 minutes).

In recent funded projects we worked with cultural colleagues in libraries, galleries and museums across the region, particularly in areas of deprivation. We offered training and support to staff to assist them in their family music groups and demonstrated the importance and benefits of musical work within communities.

In this workshop we will share information on our Creative Cultural Partnerships and Sound Beginnings projects and how they have been and are impacting young children and their families. The rest of the session will then focus on how conference delegates can design, plan and deliver their own music sessions and understand the importance of both musical play and music making with young children. Finally, we will lead a music and singing workshop, providing practical ideas to take away and use in settings and community groups.

This session is suitable for everyone. Those who feel less confident in delivering music sessions are particularly encouraged to attend.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Sarah Beresford, Lorna Brookes (Liverpool John Moores University), and Savannah, Noah & Kaitlin from Time-Matters UK

The untold stories: improving support for children with a family member in prison

Overview:

Children with a close family member in prison rarely receive the support they need; many are judged and stigmatised, and this becomes a barrier to support. This workshop will provide:

- an understanding of the impact on children and their experiences of education, including hearing directly from young people with lived experience;
- an insight into what children want (to be seen, listened to, supported and included in decision-making about that support);
- an introduction to resources that participants can use to support children and families; and
- a demonstration of how, with the right support, children with experience of one of life's most challenging experiences can become educators and advocates for change.

Activities:

1. Introductions (5 mins)
2. Their story: an overview of the impact on children and their experiences of education (15 mins)
3. My story: a conversation with young people with lived experience (15 mins)
4. Our story: how Child Impact Assessments can be used to support children (15 mins)
5. Our collective story: the role of peer support groups in enabling children to be educators and advocates for change (15 mins)
6. Your story: discussion of case study scenarios in small groups (15 mins)
7. The story continues: feedback from group conversations, opportunity to ask final questions (10 mins)

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Sarah Ward

Delivering a trauma-informed and trauma-responsive service for children and young people in North-West England

Trauma-informed care is becoming increasingly common in various settings, including education, health and social care. However, little is currently understood about what this actually looks like in practice, particularly when supporting children and young people in complex situations who are accessing multiple children's services (e.g. social care, CAMHS, youth offending services). We undertook an independent process evaluation of a tailored, place-based, trauma-informed and trauma-responsive approach intended to support children and young people considered to be highly vulnerable and at significant risk of harm in North-West England. This paper reports upon interview data from 36 service staff and wider service professionals, including those who work in local authority departments (e.g. social care, youth offending services) and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), involved in delivering a trauma-informed and trauma-responsive approach to support this population. Findings reveal the development of professional learning and the impact of collaboration with wider service professionals as key to effectively implementing this approach. This includes supporting professionals to develop their 'professional curiosity', embedding a formulaic style of working to equip professionals with improved insight and understanding, and providing service offers (i.e. enhanced case formulations and consultations) to hold space for professionals to develop their trauma-informed and trauma-responsive thinking and practice. Learning shared from the evaluation highlights the importance of professional learning to the development and sustainability of trauma-informed and trauma-responsive care, and how this can improve understanding and approaches taken to better support vulnerable and at significant risk children and young people.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Seán Henry

Queer faith for education: The reparative pedagogy of Shon Faye's *Love in Exile*

Notions of queer and trans joy have recently gained traction in education research (Greteman, 2018; Ingram & Jacobsen, 2024), including work at the intersections of education and religion (Author, XXXX). While affirming in intent, such approaches risk producing overly idealised accounts of joy that insufficiently reckon with the enduring violences queer and trans people face within religious traditions. Against this risk, this paper (following Hickey-Moody (2023)) theorises queer and trans joy for education as a kind of queer faith that is ethically, relationally, and politically situated, using Shon Faye's *Love in Exile* as a focal text. Attending to religions as both sites of anti-LGBTQ+ violence and enduring attachment, the paper resists framing queer faith as escape or refusal alone, instead foregrounding the coexistence of its positive affective landscapes alongside experiences of harm, ambivalence, and structural marginalisation within religions. In this way, following Giroux and Simon (1988), the paper positions Faye's text as an exemplification of the pedagogical potential of memoir and popular culture: the text enacts a queer reparative pedagogy (Sedgwick, 1997) that offers readers the chance to encounter queer faith amid religion's ongoing violences. The paper concludes with some brief notes for understanding the relation between education and religion, homing in on how queer faith can help us make sense of pedagogical encounters with religions, genders, and sexualities in educational contexts.

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Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

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Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Thilini Weerasooriya

English Language Learning Experience of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children Migrating to Anglophone Countries: a scoping review

Background: Acquiring English proficiency plays a pivotal role in the post-migratory lived experience of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) pursuing refugee status in high-income anglophone countries. However, there is limited current collective evidence about their English language learning experience following migration.

Aim: The following study aims to present a thorough demonstration of existing knowledge on the English language learning experience of UASC moving to high-income English-speaking countries through a scoping review.

Method: Initially, Boolean searches were conducted on JSTOR, Elsevier SCOPUS, EBSCO Education Research Complete, Science Direct, ERIC and Proquest online databases. Eligible articles were selected according to explicitly set inclusion and exclusion criteria and key information on the English language learning experience of UASC was collated using meta-ethnography. Methodological quality of included articles was appraised using JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Qualitative Research and PRISMA-ScR framework was used to guide overall reporting of the review.

Results: Current evidence highlights that mental health and emotional well-being, prior education exposure, constant changes in socioeconomic status, absence of parents and the relationship with the guardian figures, interpersonal relationships of the UASC, personalised learning support, specialised training needs for ESOL teachers, relevance of assessment techniques, allocation of academic resources, negative perception towards UASC, and other temporal factors impact UASC English learning experience.

Conclusions: The review emphasise that the resources available in high-income anglophone countries were not adequate to address the complex needs of the UASC, partly due to the diverse characteristics of the population in addition to the need for further studies that capture the lived experience of UASC and related professionals.

Keywords: unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, English language learning experience, high-income anglophone countries, scoping review

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Tim Saunders

Personality patterns and adverse professional experiences: from ACEs to APEs in professional supervision

The concept of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is now well established across the helping professions. This workshop introduces a parallel concept, Adverse Professional Experiences (APEs), to name the critical incidents, toxic inspections, vicarious trauma, malicious complaints, and workplace conflicts that can damage helping professionals.

Drawing on Daniel Siegel's interpersonal neurobiology, the workshop presents the nine Patterns of Developmental Pathways (PDPs), characteristic ways in which people organise their experience, direct their attention, and regulate emotion (Siegel, D. J., et al, 2024, *Personality and Wholeness in Therapy: Integrating 9 Patterns of Developmental Pathways in Clinical Practice*). Just as ACEs deepen the grooves of childhood personality patterns and narrow access to integration, APEs do the same to professionals: default strategies become more entrenched, the range of available responses contracts, and wellbeing is undermined in pattern-specific ways.

The workshop opens with a conceptual introduction to APEs and the PDP framework, then moves into guided self-assessment. Participants identify the personality patterns they most recognise in themselves and explore how adverse professional experiences have shaped their defaults: which aspects of helping they gravitate toward, which they avoid. Paired and small group dialogue enables participants to test their self-assessment with others.

The session is relevant to practitioners, supervisors, and managers across education, health, social care, and youth work. No prior knowledge is required. Participants will leave with a practical vocabulary for professional self-knowledge that can inform restorative supervision, reflective practice, and ultimately the quality of helping we provide to improve life chances.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Tom Duffell & Rachel Wilcock

Gender responsive men's health, education and research: ten years of lessons from researching with boys and men

Men face unique barriers to accessing health services, and some barriers can impact some groups of men more than others. Whilst this is an under-researched area, we do know that men are less likely to attend NHS Health checks (Patel et al., 2021) and are less likely to be in contact with or accessing community mental health services for severe mental illness but are more likely to be admitted as an inpatient (NHS Digital, 2024). Additionally, suicide remains the leading cause of death for men under 50, with men accounting for 3 out of 4 people who died by suicide in 2024 (ONS, 2025). It has been argued that the brand of professional sport can be an important 'hook' for engaging and appealing to broad groups of local residents, especially men and those living in under-served communities (Brazier et al., 2024; Maclean et al., 2025; Pringle et al., 2013; Pringle et al., 2021; Wilcock et al., 2021; Duffell., 2025) and many programmes delivered by club-community organisations (CCOs) have contributed to various positive health outcomes among men, including improved mental health and suicide prevention (e.g. Benkwitz and Healy, 2019; Dixon et al., 2019; Wilcock et al., 2021; Duffell et al., 2025). Whilst research has started to emerge to inform more gender-responsive programme and systems design (Galdas et al., 2023; Galdas et al., 2025), there has been little to guide researchers in conducting gender-responsive research with young boys and men. The presenters have led research in this area for over a decade and aim to share practical recommendations for organisations and researchers who work with young boys and men.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Tu Nguyen

Between Formality and Informality: Social Reproduction Theories and Vietnamese Youth's Geography of Alternative Sexuality Education

In Vietnam, neoliberal restructuring and the 'socialisation' of education have prompted the withdrawal of public investment and social infrastructure. Together with socio-cultural constraints, this has rendered formal sexuality education insufficient, uneven and fragmented. The resulting displacement of responsibility onto private and informal spheres underpins the emergence of 'alternative' sexuality education - interstitial, agentic, libidinal practices of bodily and spatial appropriation that Vietnamese young people assemble and curate across informal, formal, and in-between spaces.

To critically map and examine Vietnamese young people's alternative sexuality education, my ethnographic research engages with social reproduction theories, a re-emerging analytical lens drawn from Marxist geography, critical pedagogy, Marxist queer and feminist theories. By foregrounding how capitalist and non-capitalist spheres interconnect and shift across time and space, social reproduction theories illuminate how sexuality education is shaped by – and simultaneously (re)configures – capital accumulation from a marginal Global South perspective. Examining these practices from the standpoint of young people's everyday lives locates the interconnections, tensions, and struggles that underpin processes of sexual learning, as well as concretises social reproduction theories' implications for a pedagogical programme that attends to young people's agency, radical needs and infrastructures of solidarity and social change.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Tu Nguyen, Carrie-Ann Sturt & Chiara Colombo

Glitches in the Machine: Moments and Spaces of Neoliberal (Un)doing in Education with Young People

Across social and educational contexts, neoliberalism has been widely discussed as a capitalist process that profoundly reshapes education, extending market logics into schools, classrooms, and everyday educational life. It increasingly frames education as a private investment rather than a social good, intensifying commodification, responsabilisation, competition, and uneven access to resources and opportunities. In doing so, neoliberalism deepens existing inequalities while normalising the idea that young people must individually manage their own educational success, failure, and futurity. Yet the ways in which neoliberalism shapes young people's educational lives, and the ways it can be resisted or disrupted, vary across contexts, which are always mediated by classed, racialised, gendered, sexualised and ableist structures. This reflects capital's uneven and fragmented strategies of dispossession and accumulation on a transnational and translocal scale.

This roundtable discussion brings together the research of three PhD researchers working on language education, SEND and sexuality education to examine how neoliberalism shapes young people's educational experiences in distinct yet connected ways. It also draws on the participants' experiences to explore how neoliberalism differentially shapes young people's education in concrete contexts, and to identify the moments and spaces in which it is resisted, unsettled, or undone.

By tracing these contradictions, the roundtable aims to generate a comparative and critical discussion of how neoliberalism is lived, negotiated, and disrupted in educational settings, and to open up possibilities for more equitable and liberating forms of education.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Victoria Jefferies, Sam Jefferies, Victoria Chatburn & Alexandra Jefferies

Shared small adventures, shared futures: community pedagogies of hope in uncertain times

Curriculum pressures often narrow children's opportunities to develop the dispositions most critical for navigating an uncertain world - resilience, curiosity, collaboration, and the capacity to engage meaningfully with risk (Sandseter, Kleppe and Kennair, 2023). Adventure becomes a commodity: packaged, risk managed, and sold back to children as an experience to consume (Beames and Brown, 2016). This workshop examines how non commodified adventure, as practised within community based scouting, can expand children's life chances and make hope possible through relational, place based pedagogies (Malone and Crinall, 2023).

Facilitated by Scout leaders and a 12 year old Scout, this workshop invites participants to rethink what 'adventure' means for children aged 4-18. Combining academic framing with collaborative design tasks, intergenerational case studies and reflective dialogue, we explore how small, cumulative experiences offer opportunities to reclaim adventure as slow pedagogy (Clark, 2023) and relational encounters with the unknown (Reid and Brymer, 2023). Together, we surface tensions between safety/risk (Zinn, 2015), structure/autonomy (Rosa, 2019), and adult control/child agency (Mayes, 2023), considering how these dynamics shape learning.

We position adventure as a pedagogical stance that restores children's right to explore, experiment, and contribute - conditions essential for fostering hope in ever-changing times (Mitchell and Moss, 2024). Participants will leave with a theoretically grounded yet practical framework for embedding meaningful adventure in educational settings and beyond, alongside renewed recognition of the transformative potential of trust, community, and uncertainty in shaping equitable futures. This workshop is ideal for anyone interested in cultivating the skills that matter - from Squirrels to students, from Beavers to boardrooms.

Improving Life Chances and Making Hope Possible Through Education 2026

Wendy Henshaw

Using pupil voice to inform Initial Teacher Education regarding mental health in schools

This presentation focuses on the specialist provision at Medical Needs Education and how pupil voice has been used to inform Initial Teacher Education at Edge Hill University.