

Transcript

00:00:01 Claire

Welcome to the Repair-Ed podcast where we reflect on education and reimagine equitable futures. I'm Claire Neaves, a researcher who worked in education in the city of Bristol in the South West of England for over 15 years. In each episode, I'll talk to educators and thinkers about current injustices in our schooling system and their ideas for creating fairer educational futures. This podcast forms part of Repair-Ed: a 5-year project, funded by UKRI to examine educational inequality in Bristol's primary schools.

00:00:35 Claire

Welcome to another episode of the Repair-Ed podcast. My guests today are Michelle Graffagnino from the University of Bristol and Jane Hower, from Hartcliffe and Withywood Venturers.

00:00:45 Claire

Hi both.

00:00:46 Jane

Hello.

00:00:47 Michelle

Hello.

00:00:47 Claire

Can you start off by telling us a bit about yourselves and your roles? We'll start with Jane.

00:00:53 Jane

Yes, I'm- my name's Jane Hower. I lived in Hartcliffe for most of my life.

00:01:00 Jane

I work for Hartcliffe and Withywood Venturers in training, teaching and I'm working with the University of Bristol Student Engagement currently.

00:01:11 Claire

Brilliant, thank you. Michelle.

00:01:14 Michelle.

I'm Michelle Graffagnino, been working with the University of Bristol for a few years, mostly PGCE related. And now I'm the micro qualification lead working alongside Jane in the Hartcliffe and Withywood Micro-campus.

00:01:31 Claire

Brilliant, thank you. And we'll get on to talking a bit more about that later on. But before we talk specifically about the work you're doing in Hartcliffe, I wanted to get your thoughts, both of you, on where you see injustice in the education system, just generally.

00:01:46 Michelle.

Okay. I see injustices with a number of different hats.

00:01:53 Michelle.

So as a teacher working in schools in and around Bristol, I used to gravitate towards the children that were struggling with the education system, maybe because they really liked geography, but I just tended to try to build those relationships with those students and I did it well and that's something which I really enjoyed but equally was frustrating because of the injustices which they experienced. Despite the experience which they would have in my like one lesson, they were navigating a lot of difficult times in their educational journey and then as a governor in a school in BS13 for the last seven years, again, I feel like injustices come with schools just not having enough time, money, resource, training.

00:02:54 Michelle.

I feel like there's so many teachers and staff like doing their everything and the system failing them really.

00:03:06 Michelle.

And injustices, I've got a child who's got an Educational Health Care Plan. That took four years and to watch them struggling, as you see with a lot of students, that I feel is a big injustice. Like we need much quicker interventions and support, time, money, resource to stop these injustices really.

00:03:33 Michelle.

And then I think as a PGCE tutor, I see a lot of things that I don't agree with in schools and that's quite difficult to sit at the back of class and watch my training teachers not be able to do everything that we teach them to do at university because sometimes schools won't let them.

00:03:55 Michelle.

There's sort of strict routines and ways - scripting sometimes in some schools that prevents the teachers sort of being creative and being autonomous in the classroom.

00:04:11 Michelle.

So lots of different layers of injustices which I see and I'll go on later on with the sort of micro-qualification but you know the women that we've recruited onto that course they didn't have to have prior qualifications and there's lots of reasons why they couldn't get those prior qualifications and that's something which I'm really passionate about is open up avenues to people where the education system has failed them, avenues to opportunities beyond qualifications that are needed.

00:04:45 Claire

Great, thank you.

00:04:46 Jane

And for myself, working in adult education, the lower end of it, I've seen a lot of people that have been let down through schools coming on to the courses at the Gatehouse Centre where I work HWV. And they haven't got even the basic education. So they feel that education isn't open to them.

00:05:09 Jane

And I totally agree with Michelle on the special educational needs children that are being let down.

00:05:19 Jane

I myself have a five-year-old grandson. He's got an EHCP plan, but he's already been told he's going to fail.

00:05:27 Claire

Oh gosh.

00:05:29 Jane

So with that in mind, how can we expect children who are being told that to feel that they can achieve anything?

00:05:35 Claire

Yes, just having his future foreclosed already before he's even started.

00:05:40 Jane

Before he's even really started education. So there's a lot of injustices there instead of working to what his needs might be and giving him that avenue.

00:05:51 Jane

So yeah, I see a lot, both ends of the scale. I see a lot of young people come to us who has been put in exclusion a lot of times because of SEND issues and instead of addressing that and supporting them, they're just being locked away in a room basically and told to get on with it.

00:06:10 Claire

Yeah, we had an episode of the podcast where I talked to Jodie about SEND issues more widely and yeah, it's really, it's upsetting but it's useful to hear some of those specific examples around the ways in which the system causes harm.

00:06:27 Claire

So let's sort of look specifically at Hartcliffe then. One of the reasons why I was really, really keen to do this podcast is that Hartcliffe and Withywood, the ward, is one of the areas that our project is working in Bristol.

00:06:40 Claire

So we've done field work in a school there, we've interviewed people who used to go to school in the area, spoken to some people who know the community really well. So it's really great to look at this other end because we look at primary education.

00:06:54 Claire

So let's have a look at the work you do with the micro-campus and how did that come about Michelle? How did it sort of come into being?

00:07:05 Michelle.

So the University of Bristol actually set up a micro-campus in Barton Hill in 2020 and that was strategically placed because we have actually always had a presence in Barton Hill with the Wellspring Settlement and over the past two centuries, the university had worked really closely, the academics in the university worked really closely with the community there.

00:07:31 Michelle.

And for one reason or another, that paused or wasn't a priority. So the Wellspring Settlement actually invited us to set up a micro-campus and to have a much bigger presence there. In 2020 that opened and ever since there's been like the little library, we've got Power Education tutoring going on there, we've got a new entrepreneurship course starting there as well. There's loads of other things that are going on there.

00:08:05 Michelle.

And then we sort of looked at other areas within the city and the Sutton Trust Opportunities Index highlighted that Hartcliffe and Withywood was very low in terms of opportunities.

00:08:21 Michelle.

And I don't like to dwell on this sort of deficit model, but I think it is important to state the statistics that in terms of participation onto higher education compared to our Clifton Ward, which is 100%, I think it's about 8%.

00:08:36 Jane.

Eight percent.

00:08:37 Michelle.

In Hartcliffe and Withywood, and equally it ranks really highly on the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

00:08:44 Michelle.

So we're thinking about our civic university agenda and it seemed to fit, to bring the university south of the river. And I think that's a really important thing for me to say as well. So I grew up in BS13 and University of Bristol just wasn't somewhere where I would have ever applied to go to university. I actually ended up going to UWE because UWE seemed more representative to me as a first in family to go to university from a working-class background. I didn't see myself represented in the University of Bristol. It seemed high up on the hill and quite elitist.

00:09:28 Michelle.

And so I feel like that was a big move for University of Bristol to set up a micro-campus, literally on the border of Hartcliffe and Withywood, but also south of the river, like to have that presence of a, you know, Russell Group University. It's just great to have it there.

00:09:45 Michelle.

And then we got some funding from the Office for Students as well as an innovation fund that Tom Sperlinger, who is our civic sort of, Director of Civic Spaces, secured that funding and the University of Bristol also backed it with more money as well as additional partners on this bid and with Evelyn Welch's approval, we were able to set up this micro qualification as well. So another opportunity for this area.

00:10:17 Claire

Brilliant. And what actually happens there, Jane?

00:10:22 Jane

So in the space, quite a lot happens as a micro-campus. We've got things like the menopause cafe as a monthly meeting for women going through the menopause, just trying to find out information about it. That's run with local doctors and students from the university.

00:10:41 Jane

There's a pet advice drop-in that's proven very popular where people could come in with or without pets and get some advice as well as some free food.

00:10:53 Jane

We have a maths homework club that happens there every week on a Monday where children from years five and six can come in, which is great.

00:11:05 Jane

There's been a lot going on and obviously the micro-qualification, which is very dear to me. I've been trying to champion higher level courses in the area for adults especially. It's to break that cycle of not believing people can go to university. If children see their parents actually considering it, then it's something that's going to open up for them as well. So yeah, it's a great space.

00:11:36 Claire

Great.

00:11:37 Claire

And I'm really interested in how you designed the qualification with and for the community. So how do you go about something like that?

00:11:46 Michelle.

So we were very lucky that we had the time to do this. So I was appointed in July and Jane, I think you were appointed just before that point.

00:11:58 Michelle.

And obviously working with Hartcliffe and Withywood Venturers meant that, because they'd been there for 30 years, the community trusted Hartcliffe and Withywood Venturers. They give a lot. It's an enterprise space. As Jane said, it's got, it offers lots as a community space.

00:12:13 Michelle.

So to come in and work with Jane and the wider team meant that we were invited to a lot, a lot of fantastic things that are going on in South Bristol. It meant that we were able

to talk to local people, local organisations, community advocates, industry employers and then through that engagement we were able to start realising what people wanted and also what was missing as well.

00:12:44 Michelle.

So level 3 was a big thing that was missing in the area. Lots of people leave school at 16 and unless they go to the college in the centre or some of the colleges on the outskirts, there's no sixth form provision in this area and for a lot of them the cost of the buses, the buses that don't turn up, not maybe having the money to afford what everyone else is wearing, those sorts of big pressures, the anxieties of making that big leap is big and one of the things that we were able to do is set up some co-design workshops.

00:13:25 Michelle.

So Tom Sperlinger and myself sort of led on the industry and employer workshops and actually there were, gosh, between I would say like 50 to 70 organisations represented in the room and from the local colleges, local employers, national employers, industry partners...

00:13:47 Michelle.

And it was great to capture from them what they want from employees as well. And some of the themes that emerged were things like critical thinking, problem solving, working collaboratively, taking initiative, perseverance to keep going with things, to be able to talk as well to different people. So those were some of the skills that were coming through, which they were saying that they wanted us to sort of develop.

00:14:15 Michelle.

And then we met with community advocates. And again, we had brilliant representation from the local area, people that have been working with local residents for a long time, like Heart of BS13, for example, Hartcliffe and Withywood Community Partnership, the BMX group.

00:14:33 Michelle.

There were loads of different people in the room. And they were telling us that there's a real need to boost people's confidence. There's a real need to support people's flexibility. A lot of them have got caring responsibilities and to sort of work with that and to support them.

00:14:52 Michelle.

They wanted support through. So support in, support through and support out. And that was really important as well.

00:15:01 Michelle.

I think one of the things which Hartcliffe and Withywood Venturers said, you know, we don't really want you to come in and just set up the micro-qualification just take people away from the area. They want this to be sort of distributed and like a circular sort of impact. And that's what we're here to do. We're here to stay and we're here to have an impact on the local community with the local community.

00:15:24 Michelle.

And then we also did some taster sessions, which were co-design workshops with the local people. We hosted about six of those. So we invited people in to tell us what they wanted from the micro-qualification, whilst also giving them a little taste of what to expect from a level 4 qualification.

00:15:41 Michelle.

So it was a co-design workshop that was a taster session and we just gave them a little bit of a flavour as to what they could do with this qualification. So we focused in on looking at the money coming into Hartcliffe and Withywood with the Pride in Place funding and the decisions that will be needed around that and why a qualification like this could help with the changing world basically.

00:16:09 Michelle.

And again the sort of themes that were emerging from the community advocates and the local residents was things are changing quite quickly in Hartcliffe and Withywood but also in the world and they wanted to feel more prepared for these changes.

00:16:26 Michelle.

A lot of them said that there wasn't much opportunity in terms of local jobs were low paid, quite often reflecting the construction industry or retail and they felt like they wanted more exposure to other opportunities.

00:16:41 Michelle.

So we sort of captured all of this lived experience and we started to sort of plot this and emerging themes came through basically and that's what led to the creation of Skills for a Changing World with a focus on entrepreneurship and professional studies.

00:17:03 Claire

Great. And what's some of the feedback from the local community and the people who engaged on the course?

00:17:11 Jane

So we're getting quite a lot of positive feedback. The students that's on the course currently, they're really enjoying the course.

Obviously there is that confidence anxiety. We're the third session in. So obviously it's a leap for people who haven't been in education. So it's the support they're getting around this course is just as important as actually doing the course for a lot of the students.

00:17:40 Jane

Locally there was a little bit of, 'is this going to come in and then go?' So there is that anxiety around that. We've had a lot of things parachute into the area and then disappear again. So that has been raised locally. But I think the university are doing great things to alleviate most of that worry, is having that presence is really important.

00:18:06 Claire

Yeah, and I suppose they can look to Barton Hill for an example of that kind of continuing involvement in the area.

00:18:15 Michelle.

And we've got the civic university agreement where with UWE and with Bristol City Council and the colleges as well, this is a priority. And I've heard Evelyn say, you know, this is a university for Bristol and for the people of Bristol as well as a global university. So it does seem to be a priority in theory and practice.

00:18:41 Claire

Yeah, and that's really important, isn't it? Thinking back to what you said earlier about, being a Bristolian growing up south of the river and not feeling like Bristol University was for you. Shifting that perception will take a while, but it's probably in community that that's how you start to do it rather than on the campus.

00:19:04 Claire

Is there any involvement with the kind of main campus of Bristol University, or is it solely based out in Hartcliffe, the course?

00:19:13 Michelle.

Well, just yesterday, for example, in the teaching yesterday morning, the library services and the academic study skills team came to our micro-campus to do some input. So it's been lovely and we've had colleagues as well from the university and from the community sort of timetabled in to deliver inputs.

00:19:35 Michelle.

But we have got a visit up to Clifton campus planned and we'll take them to things like Bristol Digital Futures Institute, we'll take them to the Innovation Centre and also like the Game Jam, they've got one of those planned.

00:19:54 Michelle.

So there's loads of people that are really keen to sort of showcase what the university can do and obviously it's very different to schools in terms of the resource that we've got and the infrastructure that we've got.

00:20:12 Michelle.

And then also we're going to invite them into Temple Campus. I think that's really important. In terms of civic spaces, you've got the two micro-campuses, but also Temple Campus is going to have a civic space as well embedded into the ground floor where people can come in and use and engage in research and engage with the university beyond just a qualification as well.

00:20:35 Claire

Great. I think you mentioned it earlier, but I worked in Hartcliffe for a decade and one of the biggest issues that I faced was this myth-making around the community and the perceptions of the area from people who didn't have any association with it.

00:20:51 Claire

And I was wondering how you strike that balance between highlighting the very real challenges that the area faces. You talked about the rates of the population going on to higher education being so different. How do you talk about those and publicise those without reinforcing all those deficit narratives that we hear about Hartcliffe?

00:21:14 Jane

I think because it's been co-designed what we're doing. So the local people have, you know, some, you know, ownership of what the micro-qualification is and what's going on there. So I don't think language wise we've ever publicised it as, this is a deficit. We want to empower people, to make those choices on whether they're going on to university, whether they're going to start their own business, what they're going to do next. So it's not pushing a narrative, it's giving people those choices.

00:21:52 Michelle.

And I think as well, what I've seen is, you know, an area that's been underserved, under-resourced for far too long. But actually there are some absolute champions and cheerleaders in the community that despite the obstacles, like it almost makes that community stronger.

00:22:16 Michelle.

And I think that's what I've really noticed working in the area. And I have to admit I've dipped into the area a number of times because A, like I grew up there and but also I ended up, as part of my undergraduate degree, being involved in a student associate

scheme. I went and worked in Hartcliffe and Withywood school as they were then named between 2005 and 2008.

00:22:40 Michelle.

Working in these schools, getting experience actually with the students and doing things like listening to them read and helping as a teaching assistant, et cetera. And there's just so much honesty coming from the young people as well.

00:22:58 Michelle.

And I feel like that's what we need to focus in on is the community and like the people's lived experience on this course, those 14 women which we have in the course, the insights which they have and the way which they're able to articulate, it's incredibly powerful.

00:23:21 Michelle.

I would say like

00:23:24 Michelle.

And I think we've tried our harder since the outset to avoid a deficit model, but I don't really need to try because there is so much that should be celebrated and valued from people in the area.

00:23:38 Jane

Yeah, the current students have blown my mind. Absolutely amazing.

00:23:43 Michelle.

Really impressed.

00:23:44 Claire

Great. And you said they're on the third session, so.

00:23:48 Jane

They've just done their third session in, yeah.

00:23:50 Claire

So it'd be really interesting to see... how long is the course?

00:23:54 Michelle.

It's like six months, isn't it? Because we do break for the school holidays. So it's five week unit 1, 10 week unit 2, five week unit 3.

00:24:04 Claire

And they come out of that with a qualification and then can go on to do whatever the next step is.

00:24:09 Jane

Yes.

00:24:10 Michelle.

Yeah, and that was something which came through from the co-design was they didn't want it to be a ladder to university and it didn't just have to be to University of Bristol either.

00:24:19 Michelle.

So this is something which people can put onto their CVs and to talk about the experience, the skills, the knowledge, the confidence that they've gained. It may mean that yes, they can go on to further or higher education. It may mean that they go straight into employment, potentially one of our partners that are going to be setting the place-based challenges, but equally they may want to start or scale up their own business.

00:24:39 Michelle.

So there's lots of different opportunities that this course will enable them to get to.

00:24:45 Claire

Brilliant. And I'm just wondering, I guess, about you talked about the micro-campus in Barton Hill and now there's one in Hartcliffe. Do you think there's, will that extend to other parts of the city in the future?

00:24:58 Michelle.

There are talks. I don't want to commit anything publicly. But there is definitely talks. And I think what's really nice is the Department for Education are keen to learn like this could be potentially a national demonstrator in which other cities can do similar, have been approached by other universities to sort of talk about what we're doing and there are other areas that have been like Somerset in particular that there may be talks around and that's another cold spot for HE so and what can we be doing in a more rural setting or maybe a more coastal setting or maybe a more mining setting.

00:25:35 Michelle.

So I think that's really important is because it's being very context place based driven, it's not something which you can just pick up and replicate. But what we've done with the co-design process could be and the framework for micro-qualification could be investigated in another area.

00:25:53 Claire

Yeah, and it would all need to be done in co-production with those communities like you've done in Hartcliffe.

00:25:59 Jane

Yeah, I think that's a very important part of that whole process was the co-design and working with partners in the community.

00:26:09 Claire

And that stops that feeling, I suppose, of a university parachuting in, putting something in place and drawing back.

00:26:18 Jane

Exactly, yes.

00:26:20 Claire

It's embedded. Great. And let's move on to our final question, which is the same for all guests on our podcast.

00:26:24 Claire

What would a just education system look like to you?

00:26:32 Jane

So for young people especially, it's to recognise that not all people learn the same way at the same time, especially our SEN children. They need more support. There's a lot of mental health, especially since COVID, even before COVID. Things like that need to be addressed before you get down to even the learning phase. If you can address that, then you've got more happy people that's more willing to learn.

00:27:03 Jane

And then you go to the adult side of things. Lots of funding are cut from adult education at the moment, which if you can see the model of your parents learning, and willing to learn, then it supports the children in their learning as well. And this is something, it's a whole round system that needs to be understood.

00:27:24 Claire

Yeah, absolutely.

00:27:25 Michelle.

I think for me it's about enabling every person to be able to thrive. And I think that's what's difficult about the current education system, it's very standardised. And for me it

needs to be context driven and what works for one student may not work for another student.

00:27:42 Michelle.

So it's about putting in effort, knowing the young people or the learners in front of you and adapting for them. And that's really important. I think we're losing far too many learners because we can't meet their basic needs. And that's really difficult to see.

00:28:02 Michelle.

So many of my friends' children that are out of education because the system has just failed them and not because of individual teachers. They are working beyond what they should be working, but all the stripped back in finances, like the 6% that teachers need to get, that's coming from the existing budgets and not being additionally funded.

00:28:28 Claire

So the pay rise, which we welcome, but where's it going to come from? So the government are saying, you've got to do this, but we're not going to fund it. And that leaves schools in a really difficult position.

00:28:40 Michelle.

Leaves schools in a really difficult position. And you just know the things that are going to be cut. And they're the things that keep the wheels, the cogs of the system running, the support staff and everything else that young people need.

00:28:54 Michelle.

So for me, a just education system, there needs to be so many different layers of change. Like the exam system isn't set up for a lot of students' needs. The way which it's graded, a third of students will always potentially not get the grades which they need to go on to further education and higher education.

00:29:14 Michelle.

So how can we actually value intelligence in a different way? And I think that's so sad that some people leave the system feeling like they have failed when actually they've got so much more to offer and just these women on this course, a lot of them coming in without prior qualifications. But honestly, like Jane said, you've been completely wowed by their inputs and their intelligences are coming through in other ways that may not be captured on an exam paper.

00:29:44 Michelle.

And I think that's what really needs to happen is we need to be focusing on more, instead of the rote learning, we need to be focusing more on the creativity that schools

can curate and the other skills that are going to prepare young people for life beyond school and then the lifelong learning like dipping in and out of education.

00:30:03 Michelle.

I love learning and I love like returning to learning like just developing this course. I'm a geography teacher by trade and I train geography teachers and yes I've dipped into other things because I'm I sort of run the EPS programme for the PGCE at the University of Bristol now, so the Educational Professional Studies programme.

00:30:24 Michelle.

So I sort of dipped into behaviour and inclusion through that and I loved dipping into the research around what works and sometimes things that are happening in school are the opposite of what the research is saying.

00:30:38 Michelle.

Like for example, but for me it's about knowing that actually your learning doesn't stop at age 16 and actually you can come back at any time. And I think that's what's really about the micro-qualification is the age range is from 28 to 62. And I think that is what we should be celebrating is actually returning and having that sort of lifelong learning as part of an education system as well.

00:31:08 Michelle.

At the moment, schools are quite isolated from their communities and I kind of feel like having something like a micro-campus present where the community can access it. You don't need to have children in the micro-campus to be able to know what's going on beyond that fence. I feel like that's the future of education, a really inclusive, anyone at any point in their life can get involved with and I think that is a more just system as well.

00:31:39 Claire

It's brilliant to hear you talk about it and I think what's really evident is every time you talk not in abstract terms, but when you talk specifically about these women on this course, your faces both light up and it's really wonderful to see. You know, it feels like it's such a warm invitation for these women in Hartcliffe to do something that they haven't been given the opportunity to do before.

00:32:04 Claire

And I think it's really evident when we were talking at the start of this episode that you both said that these people, this area has been failed. It's not that these learners have failed, it's that they've been failed by the system. And I think that's really important to keep hold of.

00:32:21 Claire

And obviously our project is about reparative justice, reparative education. And this feels like something which is going some way to repairing that experience that these people have had, so it's really lovely to hear about.

00:32:35 Michelle.

But also I think just on that, it really got me thinking about there has been a lot of educational trauma from these women. Some of them have gone through several schools, the care system, like there's all sorts of traumas that they've had to navigate through their life and they're here to do this for them.

00:32:52 Michelle.

But also the power of entrepreneurship. So like I've loved delving into entrepreneurship because it was quite alien to me as a concept.

00:33:00 Michelle.

But when I looked at the emerging themes in the co-design workshop and I started delving into the research, I was like, to me an entrepreneur is like Bill Gates or who was that person yesterday, the perfume, Jo Malone, an entrepreneur like, you know, someone who makes a lot of money from delivering a service or a product.

00:33:21 Michelle.

But actually entrepreneurship has so much to offer in the education system. And I feel like it really works for the creativity, for the criticality that this changing world needs. And actually I feel like that would make a more just education system as well.

00:33:42 Michelle.

And I think it's been great to delve into entrepreneurship, in particular the EntreComp framework from the European Commission which was published in 2015, but actually we've been quite slow in seeping this into the education system. But I really hope with the curriculum framework sort of changes, curriculum review changes, curriculum and assessment review I should say, changes, that we can bring in this sort of capabilities approach to our education system as well.

00:34:12 Claire

Great, thank you both so much.

00:34:14 Jane

Thank you very much.

00:34:16 Claire

Thank you for listening to the Repair Ed podcast. Please take a listen to our other episodes and if you'd like to be a guest, get in touch. Our e-mail can be found on our website, www.repair-ed.uk.