Student transition readiness research

Abstract

The number of mature students, from Colleges, full time, and part time employment now choosing to go into higher education is on the increase. A majority of students manage this transition well but a small minority don't. Having a negative experience early on could lead them to dropping out with in their first year. Simply put the number of students who do not finish their degree known as dropouts are viewed as failures by Universities which then affects the reputation of the institution by reducing the number of students who graduate known as Student attrition. This is why Universities try to support students throughout their degree whether it is ice breaker (induction days), meeting 2nd year students, support mentors, and support for students who may have learning disabilities. A qualitative study was carried out using a number of semi structured interview involving first year undergraduate's psychology students were conducted to see how students felt during this transition from College, work to University, could they handle the stress of a degree as well as trying to balance their own lives away from University. These interviews were then recorded in field notes which were then transcribed into transcripts which the author coded.

Key Words: Student attrition, qualitative, semi structured, transition, coded

Transition from College to University: Are mature students prepared for the Academic Change.

Starting University can be a daunting time for all of us, some welcome this as a challenge whilst others find it a nightmare experience which may lead to some students struggling; trying to balance a home life social and academic lifestyle which may cause them to drop out before they have

completed their degree (Lowe, & Cook,. (2003). different reasons why mature students fail to complete their studies have been suggested even though mature student enter University with a knowledge of what is expected with the academic work load, social demands placed on them. However they are more likely to drop out due to changes in personal circumstances as they may be more prone to these changes than say younger students (Ozga, & Sukhnandan,. 1998). Tinto, V,. (1975) model identifies with the reasons given above. However Lowe, & Cook,. (2003) suggest that it may be coming from a structured environment to a more self-disciplined environment, in by the individual takes a more responsible approach to their education and the academic year. More so than in their previous years in school, and college, which were more guided in their way of learning. Furthermore they suggest this can be seen as a big challenge at University, and having so much freedom can be off putting for some students and may even lead to distress and anxiety which will undermine their confidence. According to Anderson, (2002, p. xii) as cited in Parker, J, D. & Duffy, J, M,.(2005) " More students leave college because of disillusionment, discouragement, or reduced motivation than because of lack of ability or dismissal by school administration. more than one third of the students they sampled said that they felt that the overwhelming work load expected of them was too much. Furthermore the prospect of being introduced to new people could lead to anxiety which in turn could reduce motivation (Parker, & Duffy,. 2005).

Method
The sample

This study involved 10 undergraduate Psychology students from the University Centre at Blackburn College selected from a purposive sample. From 1st year psychology students who had just started their degree this year. Participants were of different ages and different backgrounds some had been out of education for more than ten years others took a gap yr between college.

Interviews

10 participants were interviewed in separate classrooms using a semi structured interview that lasted approximately 10 minutes using an interview schedule (see appendix 3) to access how they felt about their transition to University.

Analysis

The participant's responses to the questions were recorded in field notes verbatim for each person. Notes where transcribed into transcripts then analysed by the author using a constant comparative method, and content analysis and numbered by line coding. Transcripts from each interview were then compared to see if there were any themes, related words, or feelings. These transcripts were reread, and all related findings were then highlighted so that any comparison could be made.

Procedure

A number of semi structured interviews were set up in separate classrooms, in which participant where asked questions from the interview schedule (see appendix 3). A purposive sample of participants from psychology

undergraduate 1st year students who had just started their degree this year were used. The participants were then allocated a table to sit at facing the interviewer and the field note taker, participants were given an interview covering letter (see appendix 1) explaining the purpose of this interview and its research into the transition of what mature students go through when entering higher education. To avoid any ethical implications consent to take part was given using the consent form provided for the participant to read and sign, if they wished to participate (see appendix 2), after consent was given interviewers started the interview each using the interview schedule to ask the participants questions (see appendix 3). When the interview was concluded the participants were then given a debriefing form to read thanking them for taking part in the study and stating that all information that had been recorded would be treated with the strictest confidentiality and if they wished to decline from this research at a later date the contact detail were on the form of who to contact (see appendix 4). At the time of these interviews taking place other participants were sat nearby, at other tables with other interviewers and field note takers. After the interviews had taken place the field notes were then collected and transcribed into separate transcripts (see appendix 5) which were then were analysed, coded identifying keywords, phrases, and related themes; i. e. nervous, excited, and felt at ease. The transcripts were then reread again and broken down using line numbering to highlight these relevant remarks, keywords (see appendix 6)

Results

The focus of the research study was the transition of mature students are they prepared for academic change key words, and themes, and data was identified using a semi structured recorded, transcribed interviews relating to the transition for mature student from different backgrounds to University.

Data was collected by preparing the transcripts ready to be analysed using a coding system which would be consistent throughout the processing of the transcripts. Transcripts were then re-read and highlighted in stages to show key words, phrases, and themes

Stage 1 Listing words

Words that repeated throughout the transcripts were listed as key words (see appendix 5and 6), these kept appearing throughout the transcripts and were highlighted by using line numbering as well as content analysis, as shown in transcript 1 question 4 line 12 " how did you feel leading up to and including your first week at college/ University", to which she replied that she " felt nervous and excited". This was then coded and highlighted as feelings In transcript 2 however only the word excited is used this time in line 11. Throughout these transcripts it is shown that 4 out of 10 participants interviewed answered question 4 with the word excited, 5 out of 10 answered the same question nervous and excited. However just one nervous, theses were key words that stood out throughout the transcripts (see appendix 5, 6). However as well as key words the transcripts also showed phrases that stood out as shown in question 5 " Were there any activities that helped you in your transition to university induction, activities, or meeting the second years" etc.? felt at ease was a popular phrase used

(see appendix 5 transcript 1 line 16) again with a couple of exceptions 5 participants used the phrase felt at ease, 1 participant said there was no help (see appendix 5 transcript 9 line 19) another participant found the interview helpful(see appendix 5 transcript 10 line 18)

Stage 2 Phrases

However the transcripts showed no key phrases but did show how many of the participants said things that were related for example fulltime mother, working fulltime/ part time. (See appendix 5, 6 transcripts).

Stage 3 themes

The transcripts showed some related themes these themes could be associated with feelings as in transcript 3 (line 12) (see appendix 5, 6) the participant said that they were" nervous and excited" however in transcript 4 (line 11) " excited" was used this can interpreted as the participant could have been confident or happy at starting University whereas in transcript 3 we could assume that the participant implied fear and joy.

Discussion

The study carried out was limited in its investigation due to the small purposive sample. However the results do show key words and themes throughout the transcripts which have been identified in the results section of this paper, Lowe, & Cook,. (2003) mentioned earlier University can be daunting time for all of us and may cause people to drop out of University before they have finished their degree, even though this study has been carried out with a small purposive sample of mature students with either

gaps or no gaps in their education it is shown that the students are still enjoying their first year now that assignments are done but have commented on the work load (see transcript 3 line 23, transcript 8 line 24) Ozga, & Sukhnandan,.(1998) study showed that due to balancing a home and social life not to mention the increased academic work load mature students where prone to a higher dropout rate. However without the figures to compare student intake to student attrition In conclusion as the results of this paper show this doesn't always have to be the case if the transition period can be supported with certain interventions such as ice breaker sessions (inductions) as well as new students meeting 2nd year students who can give their own experience of how they coped with their first year and any problems that they faced and got through, as well as answering question put to them, as was highlighted in the (transcripts stage 3 themes) they " felt at ease after meeting the 2nd year students and their inductions" to see if these interventions truly work we may need to have the dropout rates from both last year and this year student intake and compare them to see if mature students are coping with the transition to the academic change to University, one further recommendation is this study could be used as a pilot study in that the results identified area that may need further investigation by using either a semi structured interview or to reach a a wider participant sample using a questionnaire designed with the results of this paper.

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