Stream: Pedagogic Research

Submission title:
Graphical research methods: exploring transitional student identity

Presenter:
Debbie Meharg

Research carried out by the Scottish Government (2014) revealed that Further Education Institutes (FEIs) have played a key role in widening participation with the 47 per cent of HNC/D students who progress to university accounting for a significant 90 per cent of university students from disadvantaged backgrounds. To address this issue, in 2013 the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) required universities to support additional places to progress students from FEIs to university by way of 'guaranteed articulation' (Scottish Funding Council, 2013). These students are known as associate students and receive dual enrolment, in effect wearing 'two hats' – that of the college student studying for their higher national diploma (HND) and that of a university students who is working towards 3rd year entry on university campus. These articulation models pose significant challenges for higher education institutions and in particular, for articulating students as they struggle to 'fit in' and adapt to a new learning environment and traditional academic expectations. During transition to university students undergo a significant change in identity as they 'shed' their college identity and replace this with the new university student identity. How a student sees themselves is complex and is tied to their ability to keep a particular narrative going (Giddens, 1991). Social identity is a strong contributor in student identity formation and Hogg et al (2004) posit that individuals favour in-group identities over outgroup and discriminate accordingly. The group identity within a university context could be thought of as 'student' but this is categorized further by faculties, schools and even specific subject classifications. The definition of one's identity goes beyond the general and is specific and contextualized as 'computing student' or 'engineering student' by most. Students who strongly identify with their subject of study and have a clear achievement identity status can see the long-term establishment of their identity right through to their graduate career. The experiences of FEI students before, during and after their transition will influence how their university student identity develops.

Graphical research methods are employed in this study as they allow the students themselves to become the agents for change – they will shape the interventions and frameworks deployed for future cohorts of associate students. Photovoice, also known as *photo-novella* (Wang & Burris, 1994), *auto-driving* (Heisely and Levy, 1991), and *reflexive photography* (Douglas, 1998), is a participatory photography methodology in which participants use a camera to generate data, directly involving the participants in the research process. The photographs are used to support critical reflection amongst the participants and provide the researcher with 'direct entry into their point of view' (Radley & Taylor, 2003).

This session will reveal early findings from this research and share some of the photographs taken by the participants which provide insights into the way in which students develop their identity, influenced by academic and social integration.

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