

Stream: Pedagogic Research

Submission title:

Direct entrants – a distinctive form of engagement

Presenter:

Julia Fotheringham

Students articulating from college onto engineering degree programmes at Edinburgh Napier may be characterised as being in need of extra support in order to assist them to engage with new study practices and learning at University. For Associate Students, transition preparation activities are provided by University staff while students are still at college as well as upon arrival at university into the third year of degree programmes. Support initiatives for these students vary by programme, but induction and signposts to academic skills support are generally offered as a minimum during the first few weeks at university. A longitudinal, sociocultural study of Associate Students explores the transition process from college to university and tries to understand how students recognize or reject different types of student support as they take up new practices associated with studentship at University (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000). Forty nine Associate Students in four different college locations participated in phase 1 of the study, and twelve of those students participated in phase 2 after their transition to engineering programmes at University. Observations, focus groups and interviews with staff and students were deployed in colleges and university to generate data. Elements from Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Foot, 2014) were taken as themes for making initial connections between the data and research questions relating to the Associate Student project as an activity system. Subsequent analysis uses concepts from Wenger-Traynor and Wenger-Traynor's (2015) landscapes of practice to explore more detailed aspects of student practices.

Far from seeing themselves in need of additional support, the Associate Students form strong cohesive and supportive groups with each other in order to achieve their goals, using advice from the group as well as from academic staff in order to adapt their learning and study practices to meet the needs of their new environment. They reject typical conceptions of 'belonging' or social integration with continuing students but they are certainly not alienated or disengaged (Kahu, 2013) from their learning experience at university. Instead, the Associate Students value their college experience and form a functioning community of practice from which they encounter the entire landscape of practice (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015) that constitutes the Associate Student system.

In this presentation, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2015) concept of knowledgeability in landscapes of practice will be used to explore how Associate Students identify and dis-identify with the multiplicity of practices they encounter in their transition from

college to university. This sociocultural perspective offers insight into the complexity of non-traditional students' engagement as direct entrants and has implications for the design of formal student support initiatives, and the significance of interactions between students and academic staff.

References

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