UNIQUE STUDENT TRAJECTORIES: EXPLORING NON-TRADITIONAL ROUTES AND JOURNEYS THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION

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Introduction

- Recent graduates of the University of the West of England
  1. Graduate researchers
  2. Student learning mentors

- Methods:
  1. Interviews with students throughout their first and second year
  2. Own observations and reflections of student interactions through graduate advice service
Adapting to the Academic Culture

Language

“I was being fed all these words and concepts. (Lecturer) is lovely but there was no way I was going to understand some of those words he was coming out with”
(Female, Mature, Access, Disabled, White)

“I think they should start not basic but they need to remember that some people are studying a subject for the first time, so to talk to them like they know what your talking about, you cant really do that. It’s like learning a language; you don’t go and start teaching people fluent French, you start at the basics.”
(Female, Mature, Access, BME)
Academic Culture

Reading

“I’d heard that it was a lot about reading but when I got here I didn’t realise how big a part reading is [...] we didn’t have to read for A levels, like maybe a couple of articles but it is a lot of reading.”
(Female, Young, A level, White)

Past experiences of education

“It was very, very similar to university and obviously because it’s an Access to higher education it’s structured in the same way.”
“So coming to uni, with assignments I’ve sort of known what I was doing really which took a weight off my shoulders.”
(Male, Mature, Access, White)
Community and peer bonds

“All I’ve got to talk about is my kids, they don’t want to hear about my kids! They want to know what I was doing last night. Last night I was sitting in studying, I don’t think they’d be that impressed you know?”
(Female, Mature, Access, Disabled)

“I’ve got a few people I talk to and have connected to but it’s not really people that I’d go out with. Where I don’t drink and stuff it’s a little bit difficult for me to connect and I find that trying to talk to them is a bit...dull, really... because I’m just not on the same wave length.”
(Male, Mature, Access, White)

“Trying to make friends was huge. In my sixth form there was a real mix of cultures but when I sit in the lecture hall I am the only black person there and that really freaked me out. That is really, really challenging, to be an alien again.”
(Female, Young, A level, BME)
Alternative student identities

“I’m just one of those people that just hears what they want to hear gets the knowledge and goes home. Maybe it’s me.”
(Female, Mature, Access, BME)

“It’s definitely about learning for me. It’s not about socialising or getting drunk or going to the SU, I don’t even know where the SU is. I’ve got enough alcohol in my house, you know? I don’t need that”
(Female, Mature, Access, White)

“I’ve never fully felt like a student really. I feel like I’m just wondering in here and doing my work and going home”
(Female, Mature, Access, White)
Student Learner Journeys

- Unique student trajectories
- Celebrating non-traditional students’ progress and success
“Tammy”

Female, Mature student, Access course, BME, First generation to access HE
“Tammy”

“I was just deemed as a ‘problem child’. I don’t know if it has anything to do with my race but yeah my behavior wasn’t very good at school. And I couldn’t engage with school and I didn’t understand a lot of the work... and I wasn’t diagnosed with dyslexia and ADHD until I was an adult.”

“With the community here, they all live here so it’s like partying all the time. But they’re all young and all live on campus and I’m old and live outside and just come here for lectures and seminars.”

“Where I’m from, university is like... it’s like where smart people go”
Student Learner Journeys

“James”

Male, Mature student, Access course, White, First generation to access HE
“I was completely opposed to education because of the environment that I was in...it was not acceptable...that sort of mentality.”

“I messed about through all my life, I left school at 14 ... now I’m at a later stage in life I don’t know I just seem to have a lot of determination and a lot of passion in not just achieving the degree but I really want to get a high degree.”

“Its full steam ahead now, I’ve wasted enough years.”
Conclusion

- What if we change how we think about and respond to non-traditional students as a whole?
- A move from ‘problematic’ to ‘aspirational’
- Student identity-Is it time for a general cultural change?
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