

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

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Challenging Students' Identities as Consumers and Supporting their Identities as Learners: Successful Evaluation of a Teaching Workshop

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Abstract: The pandemic caused by Coronavirus has reinforced the notion of students as consumers of the higher education. However, identifying as a consumer has a negative impact on students' motivation for learning and academic performance (e.g., Bunce et al., 2017). This talk will present an evaluation of a teaching workshop (see www.brookes.ac.uk/SIIP) designed to challenge and enable students to reflect on their consumer identities and to support their identities as learners. Twenty-nine students took part in the workshop in which they discovered the strength of their consumer and learner identities, learnt about research on the negative impacts of being a consumer of their education, and engaging in small group guided discussion. The results revealed that, after the workshop, 50% of students' reported that their learner identities increased and 45% reported that their consumer identities decreased. In conclusion, this teaching workshop provides a promising method for educators to support students' learner identities.

Paper:

The global pandemic caused by Coronavirus has reinforced the notion of students as consumers of the higher education experience. Concerns about value for money and student requests for refunds are at the forefront of discussions about how to deliver teaching provision. However, research has shown that students who identify more strongly as consumers are less likely to take a deep approach to their learning, and their academic performance suffers (e.g., Bunce et al., 2017; Bunce & Bennett, 2019; King & Bunce, 2020). The role of educators and the curriculum in helping students to navigate potential conflicts between their consumer identities and traditional identities as learners has been overlooked. In this talk, we will present a workshop and its evaluation, demonstrating that the workshop facilitates these conversations between students and educators.

Developed from our research, this workshop (see www.brookes.ac.uk/SIIP) can be used in an online or face-to-face context for students to discover the extent to which they identify as learners or consumers. In the workshop, they complete a questionnaire to assess the strength of their learner and consumer identities. A consumer identity is assessed through a questionnaire developed by Saunders (2015) in which students rate their agreement with statements such as: The main purpose of my university education is to maximise my ability to earn money; If I cannot get a good job after I graduate, I should have some of my tuition fees refunded; Because I will have paid to attend my institution, it will owe me a degree; and I think of my degree as a product I'm purchasing. Learner identity is assessed with items from The Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Pintrich,

Smith, Garcia, & McKeachie, 1993), including: I believe I will receive an excellent result for my degree; I'm certain I can understand the most difficult material presented in the readings for my courses; I prefer course material that arouses my curiosity, even if it is difficult to learn; I think I will be able to use what I learn in one module in other modules.

As a result of their identity scores, students then are categorised as one of four types of student: The Consumer type has a strong consumer identity and weak learner identity; The Striver type has strong learner and consumer identities; The Thinker type has a strong learner identity and weak consumer identity; and The Undecided type has weak learner and consumer identities. Next, they engage with the research base with a mini presentation from the educator using PowerPoint slides provided at www.brookes.ac.uk/SIIIP, and then they engage in small group discussions with questions that are designed to help them critically reflect on the relative benefits and costs associated with each type. Finally they retake the questionnaire to assess the extent of change in the strength of their learner and consumer identities.

To evaluate the effectiveness of this workshop, we have initially received data from 29 first-year social work students at a Post-1992 university, who completed the workshop as part of a module and answered some feedback questions to assess its effectiveness. The analysis revealed that, at the pre-workshop stage, students had stronger learner identities than consumer identities, and these changed post workshop: learner identities significantly increased and consumer identities significantly decreased. Furthermore, 51% of students self-reported that their learner identities increased and 45% self-reported that their consumer identities decreased. In terms of knowing their student 'type' 90% of students reported that this was useful, with some students explaining: 'It was interesting to realise that there was a correlation between consumers and poor grades. This has made me re-evaluate...so thank you', and 'It helps you understand yourself better, your motivations, and perhaps even help explain why you do well or not that well in your course'. All students also agreed that 'My intention to study to the best of my ability has increased'. 91% of students said that they would recommend the workshop to other students. A member of staff who ran the workshop also provided some positive feedback about its effect on students: 'The students in my group were very engaged and the questions sparked excellent group discussions. Several students reported never thinking about university study in this way before. Others said that, having taken part, they could now see the importance of self-motivated study if they wanted to do well at university'.

Although this was a small sample of students, the initial results are promising. The findings support the use of the workshop to enable students and educators to develop a shared understanding of the tensions between consumer and learner identities, and support use of the workshop as an effective tool for reducing students' consumer identities and increasing their learner identities.

References: Bunce, Baird & Jones (2017) [The student-as-consumer approach in higher education and its effects on academic performance](#) *Studies in Higher Education*, 42, 1958-1978

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