

**Nurturing student voice to enhance the curriculum and influence institutional change:  
The case of the non-traditional student (0179)**

In the rapidly changing political, financial and academic landscape with an increasingly diversifying student body, particularly with a national obsession with league tables and the results of the National Student Surveys (NSS/PTES/PRES), there are two areas of growing importance for academic leaders: first, finding a way to understand the experience and expectations of their students and second; how to engage them in the development of both the process and product of institutional learning and teaching strategies. Set against a backdrop of widening participation (DfES, 2003) and workforce reform in schools (DfES, 2003; Edmond, Hillier, & Price, 2007) this presentation draws upon a phenomenological case study (Moustakis, 1994) of the academic and professional development of 'non-traditional' students undergoing an innovative work-based teacher training degree of which the first two years consisted of a foundation degree followed by two years of a bachelor's degree with qualified teacher status (QTS). It focuses on the methodology which used the students as co-researchers and key findings which had significant impact on curriculum and policy making in the institution.

As these programmes are a relatively new phenomenon research in the field is limited although there is a substantial body of literature on widening participation, growing research into foundation degrees and the professionalisation of classroom assistants from which to draw. Some of that research has focused on the plight of mature, female students returning to higher education and how that has impacted upon their domestic role and vice versa (e.g. Edwards, 1993; George and Maguire, 1998; Bowl, 2005). However this paper will argue that the participants on this form of teacher training are subjected to four major impositions on their time and energy- home, study, work as a TA and teacher training- which can work in conflict with one another creating excessive barriers to learning and professional development. Student voice and experience is high on the political agenda of every UK university but there is a gap in the knowledge in HE experience which is the attention to the individual and unique voices of non-traditional student teachers and the impact of the factors on their experience that classify them. I utilise the related sociological concepts of the "greedy institutions" (Coser, 1974) and 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977) to consider implications for higher education more generally and 'non-traditional teacher training programmes more specifically.

In seeking to capture the complexity of the student's 'lived experience on the programme, the research adopted a case study methodology using multiple methods and data sources. The study took place in two phases. Sixty four students took place in phase one which consisted of surveys and focus groups as part of a wider piece of evaluative research on curriculum development. Twelve of these students self-selected to take part in the interviews which took place in two parts, the first focused on the biography of the student and the second on their experience on the course. The data revealed that there are wide range of influences on their 'lived experience' of the programme which have idiosyncratic effects depending on the biography, cultural capital and habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) of each student

teacher and how these variously interact with and are mediated by forms of institutional habitus. Importantly it was shown that there are 'four greedy institutions' (Coser 1973) of work, study, home and teacher training which compete for these students' time and energy that impacted on their lived experience which raised fundamental theoretical, practical and political questions around recruitment of individuals into both university and teacher training. These insights into student experience provoked significant curriculum change and influenced institutional policies to enhance both the learning experience and the way the university worked with all the different stakeholders. Some of the participants in the research were developed as 'expert students' and assisted with the revalidation of the programme and sat on institutional committees in both a consultancy and decision-making capacity.

The presentation will argue that this research approach is particularly useful when trying to understand the unfamiliar, in this case 'non-traditional students' on a 'non-traditional' course. In an ever changing political landscape and increasingly diverse student demographic, knowing more about our student's lives, experience and expectations will be essential to ensure appropriate and sustainable institutional decision-making.

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