

How fish out of water finally steps into the kitchen: Strategies to foster a sense of belonging at university drawn from a narrative analysis of student stories. (0271)

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Adjustment to university is recognised as a potentially stressful and emotionally difficult time. Kantanis, (2000) highlighted the importance of social relationships in this transition, with the successful development of a friendship group reported to be of central importance for student's continuation and wellbeing. Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld (2005) interviewed students who had graduated from university and those who had withdrawn. From these groups social integration and support was a major theme which differentiated those who continued from those who withdrew. From qualitative work with student researchers, Maunder, Cuniffe, Galvin, Mjali & Rogers (2013) explored the transition to university and reported that the formation of social relationships was important within the process of adjusting to the university environment. The current project was designed to identify specific strategies which staff and students may enact to facilitate and nurture belonging. Belongingness is a complex psychosocial process which is contextualised by the connection to and experience of location, time and relationships, an assemblage captured in the notion of emotional geographies (Smith et al 2012).

This research approached the understanding of belonging via storied accounts of how events unfolded and were experienced. Inherent in the process of narrative reconstruction is a positioning of the self within a broader psychosocial processes. The narrative method can explore how belonging is shaped by personal understandings, family relationships, domestic arrangements and material issues, nested within wider aspects of community conditions and special and temporal dimensions. Through storying the belonging experience, students could recount specific salient episodes which expose opportunities for productive engagement with activities designed to promote belongingness.

Second year psychology students were recruited and asked to write their own individual story of belonging, producing approx. 400 word accounts which followed the instruction to: *write a story about a single notable personal experience at University which has generated a feeling of belonging*. Participants included students who lived on-campus and students who lived offcampus in first year, as well as students with an international origins and demographic backgrounds related to widening participation. Accounts were analysed for narrative tone, imagery and themes, using McAdams (1993) and Crossley (2000) approaches to narrative analysis.

Narrative analysis was selected as a useful method as it offers a way in which the potential success of strategies can be derived from student's experiences to provide targeted goals for intervention which are sensitive to the university environment and anchored in specific points of the academic year. From this position the use of narratives permits the identification of 'leverage points' representing critical junctures in developmental sequences (Grzywacz , 2000; Stoklos 1996) when interventions are likely to be most successful.

The analysis is ongoing, but the stories highlight two themes relating to 'courage' and 'confidence' in facilitating interactions which generate feelings of belonging. The stories focus on everyday routine activities and position them as both problematic and transformational. Simple domestic and academic situations such as entering kitchens and sitting in lectures are shown to be situations which are carefully managed so that they are successfully negotiated. The narrative accounts describe the friendships generated through specific episodes as 'lucky' although within the stories this luck is associated with students changing and

challenging their own behaviour or responding to academic shaping of experience, especially around group work. The research highlights specific strategies which can foster belongingness, including empowering students to appreciate they can engineer their own relationships, and how those working with students can time specific interventions.

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