

## **Exploring Freedom and Control Relating to Postgraduate Students in Higher Education (0273)**

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The background for this empirical, international based research (Bagley, 2014) centres on three institutional Master's level courses in England, Greece and Turkey. The courses are: MA Education; MA (Education Sciences); and, MA Erasmus Mundus. Colleagues in three universities are attempting to reflect on their own professional practice (Bolton, 2014; Pollard et al, 2014) to understand how postgraduate students perceive their own identities, both before, during and after their postgraduate educational experiences (Author, 2015). The aim is also to improve our own marketing approaches for institutional policy and the added benefit of keeping our courses valid. When considering the conference themes of freedom and control, we are exploring the notion of M Level course survival by allowing our students / alumni to increase our understandings of higher education through their own postgraduate experiences. The data collected through questionnaires and interviews will allow us to create themes and compare our findings between the three institutions. The aim is to create a picture on how a postgraduate identity either evolves or does not evolve during a postgraduate Master level course.

The methodology created for this project is an interpretivist, qualitative approach that uses questionnaires and interviews to examine postgraduate student identity (Newby, 2014; Creswell, 2015; Robson and McCurton, 2016). By using convenience sampling (Cohen et al, 2011), three courses at Master's level have been chosen in three universities in England, Greece and Turkey. The questionnaire and interviews were also split into three sections: views on postgraduate courses before respondents started their courses; views on postgraduate identities as students progressed through their courses; and, views by postgraduate students on their identities, after respondents have completed their courses. The 'before, during and after' approach implies an evolving process for, in this case, a postgraduate student / respondent, but this hypothesis will be tested. The first stage of the methodology was the creation of the questionnaire and the hand out to current and previous students of the three courses. One very interesting conversation we had as a research group was whether we needed to translate the questionnaire from English into both Greek and Turkish. Indeed, the notion of monolingual and multilingual literacy for postgraduate respondents became a research issue, as it had been for the international students on all of the three courses. That connects with one of the initial findings which focused on national and international identities. We have obtained 40 questionnaires from 2 of the 3 universities. The second stage of the questionnaire is to then create a semi-structured interview (Check and Shutt, 2012; Author, 2013) which will then be used to collect data from 5 students from each institution. The interviews will be carried out both face to face and by Skype and the interviews will last no longer that 30 minutes.

The preliminary findings revolve around the concepts of national and international identity. The postgraduate's data have raised this as a theme in both Greece and Turkey from the questionnaire (Silverman, 2014). Postgraduate students have talked about internationalisation and globalisation but both current students and former students worked hard to preserve their own national identities. Evidence examines notions i.e. citizenship, language and moving into a more national pathway for a Doctorate rather a more intercultural, comparative approach (Gundara, 2000). This also connects with the SRHE conference theme of (self) control and freedom. Postgraduate students, when examining initial empirical data from the questionnaire from this research, while focusing on a more international, institutional global focus are remaining 'national' within a perceived global space within a university. This is not quite an assimilationist position, nor an intercultural outlook (Meer, 2014) but more an integrationist space (Author, 2016) whereby students are resisting part of the institutional rationale's for postgraduate Master level courses i.e. global, transferable skills with a preservation of their own monoculturalism.

We are theoretically using integration (Author, 2015) and the related ideas of citizenship and choice to examine postgraduate identities. Citizenship is an important part of identity and we are interested in exploring, through the empirical data, notions of national and global citizenship and how this might apply to national and international identities of our respondents'. They are faced with many choices as consumers (Ball, 1990; 2012) and we are interested in our respondent level of awareness in relation to the choices they make as postgraduate M Level students at different levels or stages of this process. We are also collecting the data to improve our professional practice (Sellars, 2014) as M Level practitioners. We are looking to increase our understandings of why our students choose their courses e.g. career progression, continuing professional development, but how they feel about their actual courses both before and during their period of study, which gives the researchers of this project more evaluative course information and what are respondents actually feel about their postgraduate experience after they graduate. For our alumni, what does their postgraduate identity mean to them after they graduate (Author, 2015)? As the research is ongoing, further research will be carried out with questionnaire being collected in one institution and the interviews being carried out within the three institutions. We have interestingly agreed not to use a fourth location to collect data but have discussed the possibility of carrying out this postgraduate identity research with doctoral students with the reflective, comparative focus