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Transformational Learning in the Western Australian Context

Clare Freeman

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Clare Freeman
PhD candidate

Aim

- To understand first year education students university experiences

- To determine if a model of transformative learning can be used to explain the learning experience of a cohort of first year university education students

- How does the evidence suggest a model for transformative learning on first year University study

Background/Significance

- The Bradley Review (2008) recommends making Higher Education available to people from Underrepresented and low Socioeconomic Status (SES) backgrounds
- Suggests that more students enrolling in Australian universities will have limited educational experiences

Background/Significance

- Students will face having to learn in a new environment

- This requires students to develop an understanding of the expectations and support available within that environment

- Transformational learning theory will therefore be an increasingly important lens through which to identify the learning strategies that may best support these students and inform curriculum development and delivery

Theoretical Framework

- Transformational Learning (TL) is learning that occurs when an individual questions their existing values, attitudes and beliefs (Mezirow, 1990).

- The incentive to question existing values comes from experiencing a situation that cannot be made sense of using existing meaning schemes.

- Mezirow (1990) regards this as a disorienting dilemma that leads to a process of critical reflection and rational discourse followed by 'perspective transformation'.

Research Methods

- Mixed methods
- Survey
- Case Study Interview
- Surveys and Case Studies were conducted in weeks 3, 3 and 4 of Semester 1, 2012

Research Methods

- 72 students took part in an on-line survey. Questions gathered information about :

- Student Demographics,

  - Reponses were analysed to understand the students "lifeworld"

- Student experience and attitude to study,

  - Questions were adapted form the First Year Experience Questionnaire designed to identify "behaviour of being at risk of failure". Questions were mapped to the phases of Transformational Learning.

  - Questions used the categories of Academic Application, Student Identity, Academic Orientation and Comprehending and Coping (James , Krause & Jennings, 2010)

Research Methods

- 11 Students took part in an Interview consisting of 12 questions
- Interview questions were mapped to the phases of Transformational Learning
- Responses were analysed using Grounded Theory Methods

Findings

- Demographics (Lifeworld)

  - 15% arrange child care in order to attend University
  - 35% do paid work between 15 and 30 hours per week
  - 42 % of students are FIF
  - 44.4% aged 21 years and over
  - 98% have access to ICT and a quiet study space where they live

Findings

- Attitudes to study

- 54 % of students reported being overwhelmed by the course workload and are having difficulty Comprehending and Coping with the study material. (Indicators of at risk behaviour)

- Of these 30 % also reported enjoying the intellectual challenge of studying and that lectures stimulated their interest in the course material

Findings

- Case Studies
- Students reported being overwhelmed by the course work load
- Difficulty surviving on reduced financial income and finding time to work and study
- Don't have sufficient time management skills to prioritise the study workload

Findings

- # Transformational Learning

- Analysis of survey responses and case studies showed students experience the following phases:

- Disorienting Dilemma

- Examination of self and abilities to cope with study workload and financial responsibilities

- A critical reflection on psychic, sociocultural and epistemic assumptions

- Options for exploring new roles, relationships and actions

- Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing ones plans