The Foundation degree experience: Expressions of transformation and dual identity

Liz James & Julie Wintrup
School of Health Sciences
University of Southampton
Overview of presentation

- Background to research project/HI-LLN
- Fd in Health & Social Care – key features/learner profile
- Research focus & methodology
- The student voice/emerging themes
- Future implications (curriculum development/integrating work-based learning & employer engagement)
Background to research project/Hi-LLN

- Higher Education Funding Council England (HEFCE) national initiative to increase progression opportunities for adult learners to access education, Further and Higher

- Regional LLN groupings of different Curriculum Groups (Childhood and Early Years, Retail and Management, Construction, Engineering)

- Our CG is Health and Social Care
Fd in Health & Social Care: key features/learner profile

- Foundation degrees: 2 year, diploma-equivalent, work-based HE qualification
- Designed in partnership with employers to meet the needs of the workforce (Leitch, 2006)
- Fd in Health & Social Care: offers new career opportunities for intermediate level/associate practitioner roles
- Learners: working and learning, often employer-sponsored, usually vocationally educated and trained
Research focus & methodology

- Study to explore students’ work and educational pathways prior to, during and following their undertaking a Foundation degree in Health and Social Care

- Qualitative study, longitudinal, self-selecting sample, face to face interviews, thematic analysis

- Purpose - to improve knowledge and understanding of our students’ journeys, from entry through to graduation and beyond. To be more effective in providing support and advice to prospective and current students
The student voice/emerging themes

- Transition
- Transformation
- Critical thinker
- Dual identity
The student voice/emerging themes

Transition

- Challenges: multi-layered (practical, social, academic)
- Practical - where to park, finding way around, time management, child care issues
- Social – unfamiliar territory, feeling of trespassing
- Academic – anxiety about engaging in HE study, feeling unprepared
The student voice/emerging themes

Transformation

- Increase in self-confidence and autonomy as a learner, as an employee and as a person
- Impact on family dynamics – children, spouse/partner
- Use of reflection to facilitate transformation (Schon, 1983)
- Contrast with previous learning environments – school, abroad
The student voice/emerging themes

Critical thinker

- Develop sense of empowerment that learner/employee can challenge practice and effect organisational change
- Ability to develop as a perceived expert in the organisation
- Voice of practical experience/expertise – developed through debate & discussion
The student voice/emerging themes

Dual identity

- Learner / employee – potential source of tension
- Identity defined by ‘place’ (student at University, manager at work) rather than internalised and consistent
- Important that learner’s voice is heard when negotiating the learning agreement
The student voice........

A voice in the wilderness?

.....or part of the conversation?
References