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Proposal Rationale: ISSOTL 2019

Bridging the border: using an empathetic lens to support BAME commuting students' transition into university.

The reasons for the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) poorer learning experience, the degree attainment gap and their reduced employability are complex and multifactorial (Richardson 2008 a & b; Allen, (2016); Newbold et al, (2011). This inequality that may be compounded in the case of those disproportionately high numbers of BAME students who also commute to the our University campus (Thomas & Jones (2017).

Our University is working to generate innovative ideas to deal with one element of this - practically easing the transition into University for our BAME commuting students. In education, being more empathetic to different groups has also been regarded as beneficial for communication and understanding between staff and students. through trying to understand their mindset and experiences better, needs could be more effectively identified, addressed and understood (Jordan, 2010).

This poster will share how we have used staff colleague ideas for developing a more inclusive learning culture by asking them to propose creative ideas for improving transition into university. (Smith, 2018). This takes forward the original project (Smith, 2018) focussed on our commuting BAME students experiences of university life.

Theoretical Frameworks

An interpretive approach was adopted for this small-scale project focussing on qualitative enquiry (Creswell, 2007) and action research (Healey et al, 2010) to explore how staff might solve some of the issues generated from the commuter students' experiences. Encouraging staff to be more empathetic to seeing the world through the student lens was part of the pre-survey activity briefing.

Methods

An online form to collate the ideas from the 20 academic and professional service staff was used to purposively sample staff from the education unit responsible for the enhancement of the curriculum and dissemination of good practice.

The participants completed the survey anonymously and were encouraged through the briefing to "think out of the box" and "creatively solve the problem" by actively reflecting on their own previous experiences as students in HE and focussing specifically on i) reducing student stress, ii) improving a sense of belonging iii) improving impractical timetabling and iv) working on students' assessment anxiety. i-iv) were the key thematic areas identified through the first student focus group which informed the previous work (Smith, 2018).

A follow- up parallel exercise is planned where a different group of commuter students generate their own solutions to the issues they raised and then a joint group staff/ student consider the solutions in partnership.

Results and Insights –Practical ideas are generated by the staff are outlined on the poster and description of how the work contributes to the understanding or practice of SoTL is provided.

Significance and Reflection: I reflect on the facilitation of meaningful learning that allow staff to pivot between the borders of their own professional practice and identify with students' real-life issues and aim to demonstrate how best practice is not ad hoc, but programmatically designed and implemented

in partnership with students. Without empathy and a move across a border into the student's mindset, we cannot understand the diverse students we serve.

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