

FYHE 2007

Abstract for Presentation – Nuts and Bolts session

Hearing the student experience: Listening to individual voices and stories

Presenters: Cathy Stone and Sarah O' Shea

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This session discusses two studies currently being undertaken with University of Newcastle students as part of doctoral research under the auspices of the University of Sydney.

Both studies are qualitative, narrative research projects into the student experience as it relates to particular cohorts of students. Sarah O' Shea's study focuses on the academic and social transition of first year, female students who are the first in the family to attend university, while Cathy Stone's study examines the impact of university study on a particular cohort of female and male mature age students in the second and third years of study, who have entered university via an enabling program.

Both studies focus on the individual student experience and are centred on groups of students regarded as "non-traditional" and hence under-represented in research. At this stage in the research, in-depth interviews have been conducted with much descriptive data generated. This presentation will examine the material generated so far in both studies and will also discuss the preliminary analysis – primarily narrative analysis – in which both researchers have been engaged.

These entirely separate and distinctive, yet complementary pieces of research evoke rich descriptions of the university experience as negotiated by the individuals interviewed. The presentation will outline some of the key theoretical and research paradigms informing the studies as well as focussing on the initial findings which will contribute knowledge to the field of student experience in an increasingly diverse university student population.

We hope in this session to generate much discussion amongst participants about the student experience at other institutions - similarities and differences, key issues and ways in which different institutions respond to the different needs and demands of diverse student populations.