

Evolution of novice postgraduate students

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Abstract

*This Nuts and Bolts session invites participants to respond to an example of collaboration between a Communications lecturer and a Language and Learning Adviser to create curriculum and develop pedagogical practices for enhancing the first year experience of postgraduate students. This session applies Lizzio's (2006) orientation and transition strategy of *The Five Senses of Success* to our collaborative practices. It uses authentic input from students showing their adaptations to the university during their first semester. Our goal for this session is for participants and facilitators to reflect on the actions we can take in our practice to enhance the novice postgraduates' experience as they adapt to university contexts.*

Background

Josie Healy is a Communications Lecturer and Rena Frohman is a Language and Learning Adviser at Queensland University of Technology International College (QUTIC), Brisbane. QUTIC provides pathway programs for international students pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate studies. QUTIC students enter Foundation, Diploma and University Certificate in Tertiary Preparation programs which support them in their transition to higher education. When international students enter higher education as novices they face new discourses and unfamiliar cultures. They face a variety of academic issues and social challenges both within and outside of the formal curriculum.

Since 2004, Josie and Rena have been collaborating to implement initiatives which promote students' confidence and skills for their adaption to university contexts. We have been adapting our pedagogical practice in response to our postgraduate students' voices, experiences and input as they evolve in the higher education context. During this collaboration, we have collected students' reflections on their metamorphoses through videotaped interviews, reflective journals, visual metaphors and personal emails. This data motivated us to reflect more deeply on students' experiences and change our professional practice. Through our academic-professional partnership we have developed formal and informal learning communities to promote a sense of belonging to the university culture. We are continuing to develop approaches which enhance postgraduate students' adaptation to university life.

This year is the 150th celebration of Charles Darwin's publication of *The Origin of Species*. His visit to Australia and Galapagos contributed to his observations and reflections on evolution. In honour of his theory, we have chosen to use his ideas of adaptation as a metaphor for our postgraduate students' experiences with transition to higher education. Our students have taught us that there are an infinite number of ways to adapt to the unique

environments that they find themselves in when they first enter an Australian university. Students' reflections and stories show it is important for practitioners to adapt their practices so that first year experiences can be more than just 'survival of the fittest', but can become 'successful metamorphoses for all'.

Session: The Five Senses of Success (Lizzio, 2006) – applied to student and staff evolution

Sense 1: "Students' success at university depends on their sense of capability"

- Power point slide show using novice postgraduate students' metaphors of their first semester transition experiences
- The beginning of the collaborative story – the original environment

Sense 2: "Students' success at university depends on their sense of connectedness"

- View and listen to a postgraduate student's response to her first semester experiences
- Collaborative story – catalyst for change

Senses 3 and 4: "Students' success at university depends on their sense of resourcefulness and academic culture"

- View and listen to postgraduate students' responses to adapting to academic culture
- Collaborative story – the process of change over time

Sense 5: "Students' success at university depends on their sense of purpose"

- View and listen to a postgraduate student's reflection as he completed his first semester
- Collaborative story – an evolving model for our practice

Discussion opportunity:

- Participants' reflection and discussion: adapting Lizzio's (2006) strategies to their professional context

References

Lizzio, A. (2006). *Designing an orientation and transition strategy for commencing students: a conceptual summary of research and practice*. Retrieved May 22, 2009 from http://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/51875/Alfs-5-Senors-Paper-FYE-Project,-2006.pdf