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ADULT LEARNERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE PERSPECTIVE

Abstract:

The aim of this exploratory study is to examine how Adult learners coming from Further Education and Training (FET) backgrounds experience the transition in Higher Education (HE) in the Republic of Ireland. While the experience of first year students in HE is well documented, less is known about the evolving experience of students as they progress through HE, particularly second chance learners. Prior experiences and previous educational encounters will affect how students' experience HE and suggest that one model does not fit all. The study draws on the Community of Practice (COP) literature (Lave and Wenger, 1991) which suggests that students' progress through their HE experience leads to a change in identity (Tobbell and O' Donnell). Student involvement in a COP leads them to being peripheral participants initially, moving to greater engagement with the community. The experiences of mature students bring unique challenges and opportunities on this experience in an educational context (Bamber and Tett, 2000). The study is qualitative in nature, involving semi-structured interviews. This paper argues that HE institutions need to be more cognisant of student difference in terms of policy development.

Keywords:

adult learners, community of practice, transition, Further Education and Training, Higher Education

JEL Classification: I23, I24, I28