

[DOI: 10.20472/IAC.2018.043.021](https://doi.org/10.20472/IAC.2018.043.021)

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DOES ONE SIZE FIT ALL? AN EXPLORATION OF SECOND CHANCE STUDENT TRANSITIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Abstract:

This is an exploratory study considering the concept of transition within higher education among second chance learners coming from Further Education and Training (FET). In particular, this paper explores how students use Communities of Practice (CoP). There is a wide body of literature around first year experiences in higher education. However, less is known about the evolving experience of the student in HE. This process involves moving from being 'an outsider' to shifting identity to becoming engaged student in HE within a broader social context. Prior experiences and previous educational encounters affect how students' experience HE and suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work in this context. HE can present challenges to students from working-class backgrounds in terms of their ways of doing things and their identities. It can also lead to positive change in others.

Student identities, relationships and participation evolve and change over time. This paper argues that HE institutions need to be more facilitative of differences in students, their knowledge and ways of knowing. However HE institutions, teaching practices and the curriculum need to adapt to come consider students' position and experience, their cultural capital.

Students entering HE from a FET experience come with an established community of practice perspective

Research in Communities of Practice (CoP) (Lave and Wenger, 1991) by Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013) have identified that students evolve to engage with practices of the community leading to changes in identity through participation. New students are peripheral participants in this community, full participants have acquired the valued practices of the community. Engagement with full participants allows new students to become part of the community. This brings about a change in the students' identity through interaction with the community of practice. Mature students may encounter barriers and challenges in this process because of previous educational experiences which may influence positively or negatively new educational experiences (Bamber and Tett 2000).

Keywords:

Further Education and Training (FET), second chance learners, Higher Education, Transitions, Communities of Practice

JEL Classification: I21, I29, I24