

2017

Journey into Higher Education

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Recommended Citation

Gordon, Pauline Anne (2017) "Journey into Higher Education," *Critical Tourism Studies Proceedings*: Vol. 2017 , Article 95.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.library.tru.ca/cts-proceedings/vol2017/iss1/95>

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Title: Journey into Higher Education

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Session Type: Presentation

Abstract:

The aim of this phenomenological study is to understand if the differences in teaching and learning environments can help to explain why some international students find it difficult to make the journey to a higher education institution in the United Kingdom. Making the journey from school or college to university is a challenging obstacle for many students, because it involves adapting to a new academic and social environment. Indeed, it is recognised that making this journey can be incredibly stressful, both academically and socially. Such stresses can often lead to a significant reduction in academic performance, and can eventually lead to the student not integrating into or not completing the programme (Cook and Rushton, 2008; Robotham & Julian, 2006). Entering into higher education represents a very significant journey, and it is important to explore and understand the experiences of different types of students and some of the difficulties they may encounter as they become accustomed to a new academic environment. Students do not share the same perceptions, experiences, or expectations when making the journey into a new institution; therefore, they cannot all be treated in the same way. For some students, the initial changes from their previous educational environments are more substantive than others, and some students require considerable adjustments. Indeed, it is evidenced in the literature that international student groups have significantly greater difficulties compared to home students in adjusting to academic requirements. These difficulties relate to areas such as language skills, independent learning, critical/analytical thinking and writing, engaging in research, and understanding the concepts of referencing and plagiarism (Janjua, Malik, & Rahman, 2011; Morrison, Merrick, Higgs, & Le Matais, 2005). In fact, many researchers agree that these issues are strongly linked to radically different teaching and learning environments (Janjua et al., 2011; Morrison et al., 2005). The key strength and aim of this study is that it intends to provide a voice for international students by gathering information on their individual experiences, in order to gain insight into the reasons why some of them appear to find it difficult to make the journey from their home educational institution to a higher education institution in the United Kingdom. It is therefore crucial to design an appropriate research methodology that meets the research aim and objectives, and at the same time establishes the credibility of the study. The purpose of this paper is threefold: first, it aims to identify and justify the most appropriate philosophical stance that can be adopted by this research study. Second, it provides a detailed examination of the intended research design, including an evaluation of the appropriateness of the methods of data collection and analysis. Third, it aims to employ a pilot study and provide critical reflection and appraisal of the chosen methods and techniques employed. Indeed, by presenting this to the conference, it is hoped that the researcher can obtain valuable feedback and advice from colleagues.