Exploring students’ experiences of 1-1 advice and guidance conversations: a pilot study

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‘...not feeling like that person was above me in any way you know, just very on my level...’ [PI [1]]

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Presentation outline

- Supportive learning environments in the current HE context
- Student Academic Advice: a faculty-based model
- The pilot study: an overview
- Emerging themes from the pilot data: student access, retention and progression in HE
Supportive learning environments in the current HE context

• Current market-based models of higher education (HE) (Brown, 2011; Universities UK, 2014; HEFCE, 2016)
  – Mass HE (Trow, 1972); student numbers (Nicol, 2010) and resource constraints (Price, Handley & Millar, 2011)

• Dilution of ‘personal, inclusive and supportive’ learning environments (Middleton, 2015, p.3)

• Dialogue is being squeezed out of mass higher education (Nicol, 2010; Blair and McGinty, 2013)
  – Social interaction and support to facilitate learning: relationship between talking, thinking and learning (Vygotsky, 1978)

• One-to-one work as an important part of learning and teaching (Wisker et al, 2008)
  – One aspect of working one-to-one is academic/study skills’ advice and guidance (Cottrell, 2001; Hilsdon, 2011; Turner, 2011).
Academic Advice: a faculty-based model

- Established in October 2010, Faculty of Business and Law
- 3 Student Academic Advisors
  - Module and Programme-embedded academic advice workshops, online resources, study groups and one-to-one
- Early testimonials helped inform professional curiosity;

  Through the meetings I had the chance to find out the right ways through which I could/can conduct a good assignment. As so, now I am more confident in structuring, writing and analyzing a given theme. This can be monitored also from my grades that were better after the applications of the right methods (PG, International, 2011/12)
The pilot study: an overview

• Interpretative methodology: insight into how individuals understand their experiences of discussions with an advisor (Hammersley, 2013)
  – Cases within a case study (Stake, 2000)
  – Semi-structured interviews, based on Carnell & Lodge’s (2002) work

• Two-stage pilot study:
  – Stage 1 (April 2016): suggestions, comments and bullet-pointed written answers to interview schedule (3 students)
  – Stage 2 (May & June 2016): 2 extended interviews
    • Mature, home student (stage 2), UG Business programme (FT)
    • EU student, PG Business (FT)
An iteration of emerging data from the pilot study
Aligning findings to ‘Access, retention and progression’

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<tr>
<th>STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES OF 1-1 ADVICE AND GUIDANCE CONVERSATIONS: A PILOT STUDY</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Access</strong></td>
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<td>- Student transitions</td>
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<td><strong>Transition into HE: People/staff</strong></td>
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<td>- Newness: no connections with staff [PI 1]</td>
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<td>- PG study 'hard': less contact time c/f UG study [PI 2]</td>
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<td>- <strong>Expectations</strong></td>
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<td>- ‘overwhelmed’: ‘not being in education for a long time’, ‘worried about assignments- feeling ‘in the dark’ [PI 1]</td>
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<td><strong>Feeling connected to place:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Knowing somewhere to go</strong></td>
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<td>- ‘knowing there’s somewhere to go if you’re struggling’, [reception] ‘...see them as soon as you go in’, more confidence around uni [PI 1]</td>
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<td>- <strong>Familiarity of place</strong></td>
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<td>- ‘I have the experience during my undergraduate before so I knew Sunderland a little bit...wasn’t completely new’ [PI 2]</td>
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<td><strong>Knowing and being known</strong></td>
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<td>- ‘...know me by my name...feel important...rather than just another student’ [PI 1]</td>
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<td>- ‘knowing a person’; ‘advisor knowing your style’ [PI 2]</td>
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The alignment of findings to literature

Social interaction and support to facilitate learning: relationship between talking, thinking and learning (Vygotsky, 1978)
Learning as a social and emotional process, not just cognitive (Illeris, 2004)

Access:
• The importance of nurturing students’ sense of belonging (Thomas, 2012)
• The positive effect of students being known (Cooper, 2011)

Retention:
• Time and relaxed atmosphere for students to learn from feedback/direction from staff (Blair & McGinty, 2013)
• Talk as a powerful tool (Alexander (2010); Effective dialogue as discursive – rich in two-way exchanges (Laurillard, 2002)
• Positive personal interaction supporting high quality learning and engagement in learning (Cooper, 2004)
• The establishment of positive connections with someone students believe will guide them as they navigate their studies: ‘guide on the side’ (King, 1993);

Progression:
• Referencing, writing practices and frameworks, critical questioning: Academic literacies (Lea & Street, 1998); Learning Development (Hartley et al, 2011); Alder’s (1982) socratic seminar
• Students’ reasons for engaging with their learning – personal project (Jary & Lebeau, 2009)
Finally, observations of the interview process

• Interviews as an opportunity for reflection
  – ‘...is it useful [conversations] I’ve thought about it but how is it useful in what way and what do they really give me that came during the interview process’ [PI [2], p.25]
  • Interviews as an opportunity for self-reflexivity (Kyung-Hwa, 2015)

• Interview providing time to speak in detail – valuing individual voice
  – ‘...I’ve never thought that deep about it before...I mean it was good practice...I think I’ve never talked that long...so it was good practice for my English’ [PI [2], p.23]

• The conversational style interview
  – ‘It flowed really well I felt like from the beginning to the end I felt like... it was quite natural’ [PI [1], p.57]
References


