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Researching student voice to enhance the curriculum and influence institutional change:
The case of the non-traditional student

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Aims of the presentation

• To illustrate the process/methodology of researching student experience by drawing on a study of ‘non-traditional’ students;

• Offer those students’ voice by presenting some vignettes from their stories and demonstrate how the findings informed curriculum and policy change;

• Share some reflections on how I engaged students in the process and product of curriculum and strategy development and how I think this might be developed in the future to address the specific aspirations and requirements of diverse groups of students
Student Voice/Student experience

- Growing attention to ‘listening to student voice’ on issues concerned with learning and teaching, and exploring their experiences of higher education (see Case, 2007; Campbell et al, 2009; Edmond, 2007; Yorke & Longden, 2008; Fuller et al., 2009).
- Student Consultants- Bovill, Cook-Sather & Felten (2011)
Context of the study

Set against a political backdrop of *Widening Participation* and *Workforce Reform*

The programme- FdA/BA Hons with QTS Education in Context

**Conceptual Framework**

**Sociological theory** – Bourdieu’s analytical tools of Habitus, capital, othering, field

  Lewis Coser- Greedy institutions

**Gender and class theory** in relation to higher education

  (George and Maguire, 1998, Edwards, 1993; Reay, 2002; Bowl, 2005)
Research Questions

The questions were aimed at developing understanding of these student teachers’ perceptions of:

• being a non-traditional student in Higher Education;
• being a non-traditional trainee teacher;
• how personal biography affects the HE experience;
• how the experience of higher education and the process of becoming a teacher was supported by the institution.
Methodology

• Phenomenological case study (Yin, 1989; Moustakis, 2004; Stake, 1995)
• 2 phases- Phase 1- questionnaires to establish a workable sample and interview questions and 3 pilot interviews to establish initial themes.
• Phase 2: x 2 individual interviews, 1st to gain biographical information and a sense of life history (Goodson, 1985, 1992), 2nd focusing on the experience on the course. Also- focus group and third party data (Headteachers, programme director, course tutor).
• Analysis- Phenomenological data reduction (Moustakas, 1994), Bourdieus analytical tools for analysis, gender and class theory.
Personal biography and student experience

Situational, dispositional and institutional influences on experience.....

Two phenomena identified related to their gender and their class positioning.

1. **Women’s work is never done!**
   Four ‘greedy institutions) of home, work, H.E. (academic study) and teacher training (‘on the job’ training)

2. **Working class or second class?**
   Lower status programme, lower status students lower status teachers? Less social, cultural and academic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) more experiential capital!
Dispositional Barriers

- I was worried when I first came to the university that people would think that I was common and stupid
  (Debbie)
- I am torn between being a member of staff with my responsibilities – as a nursery nurse and a student in two roles which are separate.
  (Rebecca)
- Some of the teachers think the course is ‘Mickey Mouse’ and not as rigorous as a PGCE
  (Julia)

Institutional mediates the dispositional
- All those long academic words made me feel that I shouldn’t be here
  (Maureen)
Institutional Barriers

- I need to collect evidence in other Key Stages but the school is paying me as a nursery nurse. I have to work on Thursday unpaid in the infant classrooms to get the experience. This is the only option available. (Sapna)

- She (the Head) thinks that (the HEI) has failed me in that they haven’t explained what is required well enough to her. (Maureen)

- I think the organisation of the course has left a sour taste in many of our mouths and that is purely because none of us were ever told the same thing. I think it was way of putting bums on seats and money in pockets. (Debbie)

Institutional mediates the situational
We feel like second class citizens as we never get the proper teaching rooms like the ‘real’ teaching students (focus group)
Situational barriers

There is a wide range of teaching styles that I am not used to. I am used to having a teacher stand in front of the class and teach me, not having to learn for myself. (Asha)

I make sure that I do all my lesson plans and stuff for school. This means paying for after school club some days for the kids but it means that I can cook for them when I get home and help them with their homework and just be there until they go to bed- that is when I do my essays! (Sapna)

The situational mediates the institutional

‘Starting at 10 o’clock allows me to take my daughter to school and pick her up again, so I save on childcare which as a single parent is key’…….. I had to bargain with my ex to take a day off work to have the kids so I could do my presentation with was 40% of the coursework mark because nobody else was free to help out’ (Karen)
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<th>Finding</th>
<th>Response—direct impact on improving student experience</th>
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<td>Lack of pre-course and early preparation for study at this level</td>
<td>• Diagnostic test and support materials developed</td>
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<td>• Devised an induction week with intensive study/ICT skills</td>
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<td>• Academic literacy embedded across the curriculum</td>
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<td>The lack of information to and co-ordination between the HEI and the schools and also the question of legitimacy of this form of training</td>
<td>• Information evening for Headteachers and other key stakeholders in the programme</td>
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<td>• Clear documentation of requirements and expectations of schools/students</td>
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<td>• Student conference for stakeholders- to showcase student work but also to develop public engagement and understanding of the role of the university as a local education provider and the high standard of the work created</td>
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<td>• Individual training plans taking into account their experiential capital and context knowledge</td>
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<td>The ‘four greedy institutions’ of work, study, home and teacher training</td>
<td>• Ensured HEI and school timetables corresponded,</td>
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<td>• Held additional exam boards for these programmes (Fds) to reflect the differing nature of assessments and academic year,</td>
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<td>• Revision of assessment, revision of late submission and extension policies to reflect the range of student extenuating circumstances that ‘non-traditional’ students have whilst still maintaining fairness, parity and rigour of systems</td>
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Engaging students with process and product 1

Developing a research methodology

- Students as co-researchers/researchers
- Grounded theory approach - letting the themes emerge from the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967)
- Use of epoché - seeing with new and receptive eyes
- Stratification of voice (Becker, 1977)
- Giving them the opportunity to engage!
  ‘no one has ever asked me about my life before (Maureen)’
Engaging students with process and product 2

Quality assurance and enhancement
- Development of Student Experience Consultants (SECs)
- Collaborative provision policy (CPP)- school liaison committees, involved in mentor training (alumni talking about their experiences/sharing good practice), sitting on CPP quality groups.
- Quality assurance- continued to have student representation on programme boards only heightened and more structured level of engagement.

Re-validation
- Focus groups, on steering committee, revised papers, on panel.
- Looked at draft handbooks for ‘student-friendliness’
- Research findings used to inform the rationale for the re-validation
References