‘Becoming Student’

Developing a ‘relationships for academic success and transformation’ model
Introduction to the project

- Received £10,000 funding from University of Plymouth PedRIO Fellowship Award in 2015

- A collaboration between Academic Staff, Students and Learning Support Services

- Initial focus on HE reform linked to questions of academic success, student voice, empowerment and inclusive pedagogies

- Aimed to develop a ‘relationships for academic success and transformation’ model for use across all disciplines
Introduction to the project

- ‘The Student’ as University’s crucial stakeholder; students need to be empowered and involved to lead to their individual transformation

- Recent policy developments around Widening Participation have resulted in negative student learning experiences; (Burke, 2012; Morgan, 2013)

- Students feel ‘disempowered, lack confidence and feel unprepared for university study’ (Hirst et al., 2004, p. 70)

- Rarely do we explore these experiences with our students and without a grasp of these experiences student transformation and academic success can be hindered (Gourlay, 2009)
Methodology

- Personal stories gathered from researchers on ‘becoming student’

- Focus Groups of students across all subjects and all years within the University of Plymouth Institute of Education

- Three Academic Staff from BA Education Studies; Dr Suanne Gibson (Programme Leader and Associate Professor), Dr Ciaran O’Sullivan (Lecturer Education Studies), Dr Melanie Parker (Lecturer Education Studies)

- Miss Christie Pritchard (Learning Support and Wellbeing Developer)

- Five Students from BA Education Studies (First, Second and Third Year)

- Initial writing retreat at Dartington; researchers came together to reflect on reading and share stories
Phase 1

- Researchers initially shared their own stories of ‘Becoming Student’

- This was shared through artwork, poems, spoken word or an essay

- From these stories we formed our initials themes and questions for Phase 2 (Focus Groups)
“I think we forget at times that becoming a student is more than exams and lectures and assignments, it means figuring out who you are and who you want to be, it means becoming a person in society. And like society, education doesn’t always prioritise humanity.”

“I choose to fight, I choose a future, I choose to become student

The looks, the sympathies, the fear and confusion

I’m not dead! My choice pushes on”

“I’m now wondering if I was always ‘becoming’ a student, but it took me a while to realise that...I think there is the potential to ‘become’ student in more or less everyone, but part of the process of becoming student is recognising and believing that you are becoming one.”

“Becoming a student isn’t just the academic, its the need to change the world, to leap over those barriers and to always break the mould.”
Phase 2

- Initial email to all students within Institute of Education inviting them to the Focus Group

- Initial Focus Group (FG1) was divided into two groups due to large number of responses

- Thematic analysis from FG1 formed follow-up questions/themes for Final Focus Group (FG2)

- After initial high response, actual participant rate quite low
Key Findings

- Importance of social activities
- Financial and other risks
- The ‘lazy student’ stereotype exploded
- “Type” of student involved in project
- University is not student-centered enough. We have some suggestions to improve in this area...
Future of the Project

- Work from project being incorporated into LTHE Qualification at Plymouth University?

- Highlights ideological split between neoliberalism and social justice

- Social Justice being lost with increasing bureaucratisation of university; we need to push for student-centered learning

- Connect to the student; don’t just impart knowledge


- Inclusion is a journey (Mittler, 2000)...so is our project
References