

Mature Students Originating from “Bridging” Programs and Underrepresented Groups 2010 Version

Although noted for its dearth of research in this topic (Abbott-Chapman, 2006), there are indications that students who are members of underrepresented groups experience anxiety over returning to school, given their experiences of marginalization during their compulsory schooling years. Students are very aware of how they are perceived in learning environments; therefore, they may try to avoid returning to school (Warmington, 2003). Bowles (2001) connects experiences of marginalization to capitalism, and states that capitalism is “an important barrier to the achievement of social-class equality in schooling” (p. 121). “Bridging” programs have been typically helpful towards creating a transition to higher education, however admission into higher education is not the key concern; rather, surviving higher education and working through historical traumas in education are priorities for mature learners.

Key Points from the Literature

- Entering higher education means choosing a different reality and being in a challenging new environment for mature students (Reay, 2002), but it is also realized as necessary to subscribe to the current meritocracy in order to elevate socio-economic status (Warmington, 2003).
- While admission is a mild concern, it is noted that mature students do not feel that an entrance examination should be the only means to access their qualifications for the program (Abbott-Chapman, Braithwaite & Godfrey, 2004).
- Students entering higher education from bridging programs overall perform academically at par with other members of the admitted cohort. Regardless, they experience study problems and less satisfaction during the first year (Abbott-Chapman, 2006; Abbott-Chapman et al., 2004; Kilian McCurrie, 2009).
- Students bridging from college to university have high aspirations of being a learner with relatively little experience in the different academic environment. They have exceeded their own and others’ expectations of what they can accomplish (Kilian McCurrie, 2009; Penketh & Goddard, 2008). Furthermore, if there is a bridging “course” that outlines these institutional differences then students are more likely to feel confident with tackling the program of study (Boelen & Kenny, 2009).
- Study problems originate from stress experienced while juggling financial constraints, family responsibilities and coursework (Abbott-Chapman, 2006; Hermann et al., 2008; Kilian McCurrie, 2009; Penketh & Goddard, 2008). This may cause feeling of anxieties surrounding the persistence of a downward mobility, which leads to entrapping children in a culture of poverty (Warmington, 2003).
- Significant concerns are largely linked to computer illiteracy, spending too much time away from home, and how to integrate life experience to class discussions (Kantasis, 2003). Although a more recent study suggested that some mature students prefer online learning over face-to-face class time due to the flexibility in time (Penketh & Goddard, 2008).
- Women who enter an orientation program generally feel the need for a new direction and an interest in studying, but were generally unclear about its outcomes and lack self-confidence to continue their studies. The course helped them develop a sense of purpose, direction and self-confidence (Moss 1998).

Recommendations

- Orientation, academic, and social support programs are crucial elements for students entering higher education from bridging programs (Abbott-Chapman, 2006; Abbott-Chapman, Braithwaite & Godfrey, 2004; Zafft, 2008).
- Have an acceleration programme that recognizes courses completed in community colleges or other adult education programmes (Hermann et al., 2008; Zafft, 2008).

- Provide adequate support to ESL learners that target advanced language needs in an academic setting (Zafft, 2008).

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