



Picturing Pathways to Education

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Project description:

This project explored pre-enabling programs and their effectiveness for preparing students for university enabling programs, thus filling a gap in the literature relating to pre-enabling programs and the factors that support or hinder successful completion of enabling programs. This project sought to explore students' experiences of studying in the Uni4You program at the University of Newcastle, which encourages student engagement with transformative higher educational opportunities for historically underrepresented groups (low socio-economic communities). This project contributes an initial understanding of the potential for creative engagement as a research strategy with equity target groups. The project sought to address the following objectives:

- Examine the enablers and challenges in the transition to student;
- Identify issues of access, admission, retention and success for students; and
- Distinguish similarities and differences in the experience of students who complete Open Foundation and those who do not.

Conceptual and/or methodological framework:

This project used a creative heuristic, qualitative research design that utilised a range of exploratory data collection methods including photo elicitation, creative writing and recorded conversational interviews. Participants were actively engaged in the research process via a strengths based participatory preparatory workshop, which aimed to build skills in photography and creative writing as well as trigger participant thinking about what had enabled and challenged them in relation to their experience of entering tertiary education.

Key findings:

Three key issues emerged from analysis of the participants' contributions to the project:

1. University is more than education: Engagement with tertiary education via Uni4You is a process (journey) that extends beyond purely acquiring an education in multiple complex ways. This process is developmental and identity based and therefore takes time.
2. Knowing there's support there if you need it: Feeling supported was important for all participants in this project. The unique circumstances of each participant determined the level and nature of support required for a participant to feel adequately supported.
3. Life happens: For the participants in this project acknowledgement that their lives involved much more than university was important as they faced multiple challenges and highlighted the need for pragmatism in managing their lives. There was an expressed need for inbuilt flexibility within the university context to enable them to juggle competing demands.

Implications for the future:

1. Access to and the availability of support for pre-enabling students (Uni4You) is required from multiple sources within the University;
2. Development of a student-identity and a sense of belonging within the University context are essential; and
3. Greater flexibility and choice within University systems is necessary to recognise the complex processes of learning for students who have familial/caring responsibilities and busy/complex lives.