Enhancing transition and attainment in higher education through an immersive induction module

Dr Becky Turner and Professor Debby Cotton (with collaborators)
Pedagogic Research Institute and Observatory, University of Plymouth, UK.
Seminar Overview

• The first year experience
  – Transition
  – Immersive learning

• Immersive Induction Modules
  – Aims of new module design
  – Quantitative and qualitative evaluation

• Positive outcomes
  – Student retention and attainment
  – Academic and social integration

• Challenges for consideration
  – Variable implementation
  – Managing student expectations
‘Successful’ transition to HE

Tinto’s (1975) Model of Student Integration
But it is about more than integration…

Self-efficacy: a threat becomes a challenge (Karademes & Kalantzi-Aziz, 2004; Chemers et al., 2001)

Attribution retraining (Kallenback & Zaft, 2004)
- Instructor modeling
- Peer leader modeling
- Student successes over time
- Sense of control over learning

Potentially more challenging for WP students
Underpinned by feedback
Importance of Induction

• Crucial timeframe:
  – Positive sense of self efficacy
  – Form connections to academic, disciplinary and social communities
  – Develop awareness of ‘university-level study’

• Extended / activity-based inductions (e.g. Gaskin & Hall, 2002; Edward & Middleton, 2002)

• Benefit to all students, not just WP (Thomas, 2012)
Immersive Learning

• ‘Students experience one course at a time by engaging in learning activities within extended blocks of time’ (Petrowsky, 1996)

• Benefits to:
  – Retention, academic self concept & critical thinking (Soldner et al., 2000; Richmond & Krank, 2007; Burton & Nesbit, 2008)
  – Enhanced relationships with academics, better rating of T&L
  – Better student performance (Richmond et al., 2016)
Student Profile

Plymouth University 2013-14

- 93.9% of the student body come from state schools;
- 29.7% of 1st years from low socio-economic backgrounds
- 12.6% of FT undergraduate population have a declared disability, sector benchmark of 5.8%.
Immersive Induction Module

Cross institutional curriculum change

• 1\textsuperscript{st} year immersive module
  – Introduction to the key principles of the discipline and contextualises the programme to the wider world

• 2 hour teaching blocks, emphasising student-led study and group work

• Inclusive assessment
Aims of the evaluation

• Capture experiences and outcomes of first year students initially in the pilot group (2014-15), then following institutional roll-out (2015-16)

• Examine lecturers’ experiences of adapting their teaching and adopting different pedagogies in order to align with principles;

• Examine impacts on first year students performance and retention.
Evaluation

- **Multiple sources of data, multiple methods and viewpoints** (Cousins, 2009; Bamber, 2013)

- **Ethnographic work** (2014): 2 programmes within the ‘early adopter’ (pilot) group – health / business. Involved semi-structured observations of ALL taught sessions, follow up student focus groups / staff interviews

- **First years, 1st impressions survey** (2014/15)

- **Student focus group / staff interview** with remaining 17 programmes (2014)

- **Ethnographic work** (2015): arts / science

- **Review of student retention and performance data** (2015-16AY)
Findings

Positive outcomes
• Student attainment and retention
• Academic and social integration

Challenges for consideration
• Variable implementation
• Managing student expectations
Student retention

- In the pilot, 14 of the 18 programmes improved their retention rates after implementation. Withdrawals dropped by a total of 34 students.
- In the main implementation phase, withdrawals reduced from 340 to 287, with a strong reduction in October when the immersive module was running.
Student attainment

• In an analysis of 500 modules, student attainment was significantly higher on the immersive modules than the traditional modules.
• Across students the average mark for the initial immersive modules was 67.0%. The average mark for ‘traditional’ modules was 62.2%
• Whilst both genders showed heightened performance in the immersive modules, the enhancement was greater for males, thereby reducing the attainment gap
Tinto’s (1975) Model of Student Integration

- Prior qualifications
- Individual attributes
- Family attributes (e.g., mother's education)
- Teaching, learning support, facilities, etc.
- Debt, counselling, medical, personal, family events, etc.
- Goal Commitment
- Institutional Commitment
- Social integration
- Academic integration

Dropout decisions
Academic integration

• 91.4% of students had submitted work for assessment by the end of October, compared to 61.8% the previous year.

• There was an increase of more than 10 percentage points in those students who found the feedback helpful (57.8% to 67.9%).
Academic integration

“I knew that I wanted engagement, which means I wanted people in the room. I also wanted it to be completely flipped so that the majority would be - or at least 50% would be working on stuff, applying stuff, and no more than 50%, but less than 50% preferably, of input from the lecturer.” (Lecturer)
Academic integration via scaffolding

- One tutor provided a timetable which detailed taught sessions but also expected ‘out of class’ activities (e.g. reading / group work / study skills sessions)
- Managed expectations
- Introduced ‘good study’ habits
- Dedicated time to group work
Encouragement of social mixing and peer networking, assisted by teaching and learning activities (e.g. field trips, group work):

“We’d got to know each other, we’d broken the barriers [...] It made us feel more comfortable around each other” (student)

“You’re happy to sit with anybody because we all know each other and we’re all friends, and there isn’t a feeling of, you know, ‘I don’t want to sit with them.’ … I think that has come from those exercises and the way that the module was put together.” (student)
Belonging and Social Self-efficacy

Team building activities lead seamlessly into group work:

“Working in groups enabled us to discuss our worries about the assessment” (student)

“I most enjoyed working as part of a team. Trying to get my point across in a working environment” (student)

Level of peer interaction with other students:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Yes, about right</th>
<th>No, too little</th>
<th>No too much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pilot group (n=191)</td>
<td>86.9%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard model (n=478)</td>
<td>80.3%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Challenges for consideration: Variable implementation

- Opportunity for creativity and innovation OR repackaging of existing modules
- A team effort… drawing on experience and expertise OR lone champion model
- Embedding of study skills OR ‘bolt-on’ approach
Challenges for consideration: Managing student expectations

- Pedagogies used challenged student expectations about university teaching
- What happens after the immersive module?
A Second Transition?

“I don’t feel that connected to the person taking the seminar. I think the difference is that Mary was our tutor, whereas now we’ve got Ben and Sue who are just lecturers.”

“What was comforting was knowing your personal tutor was marking, so you knew who to go to for the curriculum. Now you talk to someone in a different seminar and they had got told something completely different, and you’d ask the teacher, and then next week it would change again.”

“It's not their fault because there's hundreds of us, compared to the [immersive] one where there's maybe 40, but I would say there's definitely a quality gap.”
Concluding comments

• Challenges associated with implementing a whole-institution change programme are immense
• However, immersive modules had a measurable impact on student retention and attainment
• The immersive mode promoted peer networking & enhanced relationships with academic staff
• Integration of study skills proved challenging and requires careful framing
• Need to prepare students for a ‘second’ transition
Thank you for listening. Some thoughts to consider …

• What opportunities could an immersive format offer you?
• What challenges or concerns would you have?
• How could an immersive format help create a sense of belonging?
• How can we manage students’ expectations of HE on arrival?
• How can we better prepare students to progress on to subsequent modules?
A team effort: Dr David Morrison, Dr Sam Child, Sebastian Stevens, Patricia Nash, Dr Emily Danvers, Dr Oliver Webb and Prof. Pauline Kneale (PedRIO)

Papers and Resources:


7 steps to delivery of an effective immersive module https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/5/5988/7_steps_to_Delivering_an_Effective_Immersive_Module.pdf
References


