

Workshop Supporting the individual learner in ULLL

Thursday 10 May 2012

Opening Universities for LLL and the Challenge of Diversity Management: Comparing Groups of Non-traditional Students in Europe

By Steffen Beiten, Katharina Köhler & Prof. Dr. Sabine Remdisch
Institut für Performance Management, Leuphana University Lüneburg

Abstract

The necessity to support learners individually in higher education institutes (HEIs) has increased within the last decade and is still rising (OECD, 2011). There is a growing shift in universities to develop away from serving the elite to providing education for the masses. These HEIs are opening educational systems and widening access, which leads to a more diverse student population in European universities with more varied needs and demands (Schütze & Slowey, 2002). Therefore diversity management is becoming of special concern to educational systems in Europe to respond to these challenges and to implement lifelong learning (LLL).

Although there is no doubt that non-traditional students at HEIs are confronted with multiple challenges in their academic path (Bamber, & Tett, 2000; Alheit, Rheinländer, & Watermann, 2008; Alheit, 2009), educators still lack a clear and comprehensive overview of all potential target groups and the factors influencing their study success.

Mainly referring to disadvantaged groups of students, the term “non-traditional students” includes learners who differ from the ‘norms’ because of their educational biography (e.g. adult learners), entry routes (e.g. without traditional university entrance qualification) and mode of study (e.g. part-time students). This broad range of defining factors leads to very diverse groups of non-traditional learners. (Slowey, & Schütze, 2000) (Slowey, 2011). As might be expected with such diversity, research has shown significant differences between the amount of success enjoyed by the different groups of non-traditional students in HEIs (Alheit et al., 2008).

But, (i) what are the differences between these groups? (ii) What are the main problems or benefits experienced by each group? and (iii) How can these differences be explained? The European research project OPULL - Opening Universities for Lifelong Learning - seeks to classify non-traditional learners from universities in Germany, Denmark, Finland and the UK into different focus groups, aiming to answer these questions.

OPULL is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and contains three phases. In phase one the impact of higher education LLL reforms in the four

countries was examined leading to the development of distinctive groups differing in five characteristics: (1) adult learners, (2) learners without traditional university entrance qualification, (3) learners who are in employment, (4) learners with a non-academic background and (5) vocationally qualified learners. Phase two looks at the experiences and difficulties of these groups of non-traditional students at the participating "open" universities. Among others, differences in motivation, work-life-learn balance, self-concept as well as self-regulation and their effect on students' satisfaction levels and success scores are analysed. Finally, phase three will deduce success factors for how HEIs in Europe can become more open, which will enable the recommendation of a European-wide model for LLL schemes.

This workshop provides an overview of the OPULL project and its present state, with a special research focus on how non-traditional students are supported by family, friends, employers, colleagues, and universities and how this support influences students' satisfaction level. We will discuss possible measures which can be implemented to raise the satisfaction level of groups and individuals of non-traditional students.

Reference List

Alheit, P. (2009). Exklusionsmechanismen des universitären Habitus: unsichtbare Barrieren für Studierende auf dem "zweiten Bildungsweg". *Zeitschrift für Erwachsenenbildung in Deutschland*, (59), 215–226.

Alheit, P., Rheinländer, K., & Watermann, R. (2008). Between Educational Betterment and Career: Studies' Views on Non-Traditional Students. *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft*, 11(4), 577–606.

Bamber, J., & Tett, L. (2000). Transforming the Learning Experiences of Non-traditional Students: A perspective from higher education. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 22(1), 57–75.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2011). *Bildung auf einen Blick 2011: OECD-Indikatoren* /. Bielefeld: wbv.

Slowey, M., & Schütze, H. G. (2000). *Higher education and lifelong learners: International perspectives on change* /. London: Routledge Falmer.