

Experiencing the transition to higher education : a comparison of students with and without disabilities

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Plan

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- Method
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Introduction

Inclusion

« Inclusive education can be defined as

- An approach proposing schools in which all students can participate and are treated like valuable school members
- An educational philosophy and practice that aims to improve the learning and active participation of all the students in a common educational context »

(Ainscow, 1998; Sapon-Shevin, 2003, as cited in Moriña, 2017)

Inclusion in higher education

- On 30th January 2014 : adoption of a decree on inclusion in higher education in the French-speaking part of Belgium
 - Facilitating access to education
 - Facilitating access to socio-professional integration
- Support services needed in order to :
 - Create an individual support plan
 - Display, coordinate and assess this plan
 - Accompany students throughout their studies
 - Offering reasonable adjustments

Inclusion in higher education

- Studies realized on ...
 - Adjustments and their effects
 - Academic, human, spatial and technical, organizational
 - Points, participation, satisfaction, perceptions of University (Schreuer, & Sachs, 2014)
 - Specific challenges encountered by students with disabilities
 - Syllabi and resources inaccessible, limited pedagogical methods, schedule issues, examinations issues (Moriña, 2014)
 - Specific helpful support for students with disabilities
 - Social relationships, Personal resources, Material and environmental supports
 - (Berry & Domene, 2015)

Inclusion in higher education

- Studies realized on ...
 - Lived experience of students with disabilities
 - Issue of revealing or not one's disability
 - A need of awareness of their abilities and limits
 - A need of working hard
 - Rising to meet adversity
 - An opportunity to grow up and being included in society

(Moriña, 2015)

Inclusion in higher education

- Focus on students with disabilities
 - Challenges
 - Supports
 - Experiences

(Dong & Lucas, 2016; Garrison-Wade, 2012; Hong, 2015; Morina, 2017; Punch, Creed, & Hyde, 2006; Reed & Curtis, 2006)

- Fewer on students with AND without disabilities
 - All could have special needs
 - All could benefit from inclusive practices

Aims

Aims

- Investigate the experience of transition from high school to higher education in students with and without disabilities
- Investigate how this experience differ/is alike for students with and without disabilities

Method

Design

- 2 focus groups
 - First group
 - 5 students with motor and sensory disabilities
 - Second group
 - 5 students without disabilities
- Paired according to their age, gender and majors



Focus group

- “Guided and interactive discussion of a **group** of individuals in order to generate rich details regarding the personal **experiences** of a phenomena” (März, 2018)
 - Express opinions in a more natural setting
 - Participants nuance the opinion of each other
 - Feeling of « security » thanks to the peers
 - Researcher less influential

Questions

- How do you feel in your studies ?
- How did you live the transition from high school to higher education ?
- How would you describe your journey from the end of high school to now ?



Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

« How people make sense of their major life experiences » (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p.1)

- Phenomenological : exploring experience in its own terms
- Idiographic : detailed examination of the particular case
- Interpretative : double hermeneutic

→ Particularly convenient to understand life transition experiences

Analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 79-107)

G1. Students with disabilities

- 1. Reading and re-reading
- 2. Initial noting
- 3. Developing emergent themes
- 4. Developing super-ordinated themes

G2. Students without

- 1. Reading and re-reading
- 2. Initial noting
- 3. Developing emergent themes
- 4. Developing super-ordinated themes

5. Looking for patterns across groups



5 supra-ordinated themes

Results

Results

- Experiencing a « roller-coaster »
- Taming a new freedom
- Overcoming obstacles
- Discovering oneself
- Perceiving differently the university environment

Experiencing a « roller-coaster »

G1. Students with disabilities

My year in university is like a « roller-coaster ». From the beginning, it has been really positive, then very down, then very positive...

From the last years of high school, I had really fewer problems with integration. And after, in university, well, it's getting better and better. But that's true, it's not always easy, because it's very demanding.

G2. Students without

We give up. We go back. We give up again. We go back again.



Taming a new freedom



G1. Students with disabilities

It was in a way the freedom, so expected, because I had finally my life, but it was also a bit of disillusion, and also the reality of life... you make your own way, you try, you test.

We need to make a first step, to acknowledge, well, I need this, I need this.

G2. Students without

You're dropped out in a universe you don't know. In an adult universe, just because you're 18.

You arrive in a place you don't know anything about. [...] You need to handle it by yourself. You take ... an adult aspect...

Overcoming obstacles



G1. Students with disabilities

I got used to work a lot, in high school. I think I worked even more than now, because I found my method before.

I had all kinds of difficulties, problems to get to work, of tempo, of schedules, of organization... All this, I had them before.

And thus, in a way, I was ready for university, maybe more than someone who'd never had to deal with this before...

G2. Students without

The first semester, I didn't work at all. As I had never, never failed anything in my life before, when I got my results, I was, « Ok, now, pull yourself together, because, it's not going well ! »

I feel like I'm a loser comparing to others, because, I'm working but I get only that [12/20] !

Feeling at the right place

G1. Students with disabilities

Today, my experience, I live it as a human adventure

We are lucky, because, people here, beyond being more open-minded, they understand better that we are not different. We are less exposed to this fear of difference

I have the feeling I am discovering myself and I discover my abilities

G2. Students without

One important point, I feel totally different and I discovered myself. It really feels good, in this city, you feel less judged.

It's not easy to wake up everyday with this feeling « are you really made for this? Is it...? »

Perceiving differently the university environment



G1. Students with disabilities

It's quite reassuring when you arrive in university, there is a structure to help us, we are not dropped on our own. It gives us some landmarks in this new universe.

If I don't understand a course, there is the pedagogical counsellor who can help me. There are lots of things which are more accessible.

G2. Students without

What is really stressful, it's that the system is quite vague. Even when I go to the administration office or see the professors, they don't know.

I always have the feeling that, as it's university, we are dropped out and we have to take the initiatives. We have to take steps, we have to ask, even when the work made by the university was wrong.

Discussion

Discussion

- Both groups : difficulties to overcome
 - But, the meanings attributed to difficulties are different

G1. Students with disabilities

- Used to it
- Awareness of strengths and weaknesses
- Personal challenges
- Feeling supported by university structure

G2. Students without

- Disconcerted
- Discovering strengths and weaknesses
- More social comparison
- Perceiving the system against them

Discussion

- Both groups : difficulties to overcome
 - But, the meanings attributed to difficulties are different

G1. Students with disabilities

Express more positive
emotions 😊

G2. Students without

Express more negative
emotions 😞

If university wants to promote inclusion

→ Importance to support ALL students, not only those with recognized disabilities

Discussion

- Perceived support in students with special needs
 - Feeling welcomed when arriving at university
 - Feeling reassured to have some support « in case »
 - Few adaptations asked during courses
 - More adaptations asked for exams
 - More time → less pressure
 - Climate reassuring and benevolent



Discussion

- Perceived support in students with special needs
 - Feeling **welcomed** when arriving at university
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Discussion

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 - Few adaptations asked during courses
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- Importance of inclusive practices (UDL)
- Importance of inclusive attitudes



Limits and future investigations

- More focus groups
 - With students of different special needs
 - With students in master
 - With students with and without disabilities together
- Matching participants with the « study year »
- Complete with individual interviews

Thank you

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