The First Year Experience: an Exploratory Case Study from the National Bakery School

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Abstract

*This article presents selected elements from the research findings of a Master's thesis related to the experiences of first year students on a new degree programme. Data was generated for those elements through questionnaires and focus group discussions. The analytical framework was based on the model devised by Bourdieu (1977, 1986) and Field (2003) which attempts to identify the forms of capital at work in the lives of first year students and the dynamics among these forms of capital. The specific findings of the study were considered by colleagues to be of some discussion and dissemination value in relation to general discourses about retention of first year students generally. **Thus this article!** The findings of the study indicate that: the social and emotional capital of students relates overwhelmingly to networks external to the first year DIT experience; students were quite clear that knowledge capital and future financial human capital potential were closely related to acquisition of competence and knowledge through their degree; the factors that most students regard as essential for academic success are commitment, self-efficacy and the awareness to benefit from newly acquired skills and competences; students did not see a direct correlation between being a student in the DIT and their personal identity as a young person or individual adult.*

Key words: Student Experience; First Year; Induction; Supports; Identity; Social Capital; Cultural Capital

Introduction

The purpose of the research upon which this article is based was to understand the lived experiences of first year students in the initial delivery of a new ordinary degree course in baking and pastry arts which started in September 2007 in the National Bakery School, Faculty of Tourism and Food, Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). In particular, the research aimed to find out if the pedagogies of the new programme provided a positive experience for the students, if support mechanisms were actually effective in fostering a sense of efficacy and identity, and if programme staff could learn valuable lessons with regard to curriculum design, pedagogical and retention issues for future first year cohorts from the outcomes of the research.

This article is structured into nine parts leading the reader from the context, rationale, aims and objectives through the data, to summaries of findings and recommendations. Specific conclusions and

recommendations for action finish of the article. The full thesis is available for reading in the Bolton Street Library.

1. Context and Rationale for the Research

The introduction of the Baking and Pastry Arts Degree programme opened up an interesting avenue for the education researcher. The focus of this particular research originated in a personal and professional interest in the developmental changes taking place within the DIT Bakery School and its effect on the student experience. Commencement of the Baking and Pastry Arts Degree programme identified areas in our knowledge that are not currently supported by research. The original thesis research therefore, endeavoured to provide a platform for students to find their voice and tell their own stories as lived by them (Creswell, 2007) during their first year as students, specifically as bakery students, and ultimately as part of a third level educational institution. The research focused on a group of bakery students negotiating all that third level education demands of them through curricula and pedagogies on the Bakery Programme 2007 to 2008. Much research to date has focused on others' views of the student experience (Tinto, 1997; Yin, 2003; Yorke and Longden, 2007) while this research focuses primarily on the students' actual lived experience and their perceptions of higher education. It highlights the interpretations of the higher education experience articulated by the initial cohort of first year students (Iredale, 2008) and uses an analytical framework based on the theories of social and cultural capital as expounded particularly by Bourdieu (1977) drawing on other related theorists such as Coleman, (1985, 1988, 1990a, 1990b) and Putnam (1993, 1995, 2000).

The first year experience elicits widespread comment as a research subject in academic publications worldwide (Tinto, 1997; Yorke & Longden, 2007). The DIT has acknowledged and addressed this area of importance within the strategic plan for the future (DIT, 2007). Higher education has expanded to include diverse student groups that invariably require increased support. Students at DIT come from all over Ireland and include a growing number of international students from every continent. Of all full- time enrolments, 11% are non-nationals (Campus Life, 2007). Much emphasis has been put on the academic aspect of third level education, with relatively little emphasis on the social and cultural aspect of college life. '*The theory of social and cultural capital receives little attention as a diversity issue on campus yet it is the centre of many campus issues.*' (Barrett, 2007). Nevertheless, high attrition rates are associated with the student experience. Iredale (2008) states that there is an attrition rate of 60-90% in the first semester of the first year. Other authors such as Erickson, Peters and Strommer (2006, p. 96) go on to say 'that supported, informed, welcomed and respected students remain in education to become well informed, well adjusted responsible citizens that have an impact on society' and that nurturing, supporting and caring for first year students are essential requirements for all academic staff and institutions as students

are the most important element in educational establishments. Therefore this research focused on areas in the students' academic and social lives within the new curriculum that are positive and areas that cause stress and anguish.

The move from second level to third level education is a huge step in the lives of young people. School leavers on entering third level education experience a great many areas of unfamiliarity (Erickson, Peters, & Strommer, 2006). It is a time of necessary adjustment in the transition to academic, social and cultural demands of college life. It is a period of vulnerability when the possibility of withdrawal is greatest. Recognition has been given to the reality that the first year experience of students' lives shapes their attitudes towards learning and course completion (Healy, Carpenter & Lynch, 1999; Matthews & Mulkeen, 2001). The transition from second level to third level is often a difficult one for students as they progress from a school environment that is controlled and structured, with disciplined teaching. Attendance, homework and required learning are all instructed directly to the student and frequently assessed while at second level. Some students enter college well prepared for the intellectual, academic, social and cultural challenges that lie ahead of them; others arrive ill-prepared to meet the expectations of a third level educational establishment (Costello, 2008). Most will progress through their first year and graduate, but some will struggle with these life changes and drop out of the system before the end of first year (Crehan, 2009). Consequently, this research wanted to provide future students of the National Bakery School with every opportunity available to them, to make as effortless as possible the transition from second level to third level education, in terms of induction and support. It is the general responsibility within the ethical remit of educational establishments to provide support systems for students in a caring environment as articulated by DIT Campus Life mission statement, 2006. It is widely accepted that student retention rates are greatly affected by the students' first-year experience, as stated previously. The Faculty of Tourism and Food, of which the Bakery School is part, experienced a 16% withdrawal rate in 2006 – 2007 on their Ordinary Degree programmes with reasons being cited as transitional issues (Costello, 2008). Mindful of the importance of the retention issue, the DIT addressed the social and cultural as well as the educational needs of students through the implementation of DIT's Campus Life Strategic Plan, 2007-2010. This strategic plan sets out the goals of the Campus Life area for the next three years, in support of aims to enhance the experience for the students of DIT. The Strategic Plan identified the following four requirements:

- The need for student empowerment to generate an excellent student experience.
- The need to provide high quality, responsive and integrated support services.
- Creation of a campus community which supports a learner-centred approach.
- The necessary adaptations to serve an increasingly diverse student population.

In recent years there has been widespread change in the scale of student diversity within higher education as expounded by Campus Life, DIT. Changes have included the following:

- Increases in student cultural diversity – 11% of all full-time enrolments are now non-nationals.
- Increased numbers of student enrolments into fourth level education.
- Increased enrolment of mature students and students with disabilities.
- Increased competition in the HE sector for student numbers, which generates more choice for prospective students.

Prospective students, due to increased choices, will therefore expect greater support services and quality of facilities and will consider only these educational establishments for their future educational needs. Mindful of this, the DIT has addressed these issues through Campus Life's aim to aid student retention through generating an environment where all students regardless of their background, can accomplish their full potential (Campus Life, 2007, p.6).

Campus life supports the educational mission statement of DIT by providing a better student experience through the delivery of excellent services and activities. We create a vibrant campus community by embracing diversity and empowering students, enabling them to reach their full potential.
(DIT Mission Statement – current)

Consequently the research aimed to inform and complement the Institute's policy on student retention and to underpin the mission statement of Campus Life through the collation of research data that might assist both the Retention Office's work with programme teams and academic staff of the Bakery School.

The ideology underpinning this research explicitly engages the students in considering ways in which their experience of first year could be improved for subsequent students. It focused on the level and methods of support that students receive during their first semester, such as induction. By questioning the suitability of the established support systems, this research therefore questions the students' feelings of inclusion and identification with the School, Faculty and Institute. As a result this research explicitly inquired into the Institute's ability to foster feelings of inclusion and self-efficacy (Wisker and Antoniou, 2006).

'*As the margin or "outside" enters an institution or teaching machine, what kind of teaching machine it enters will determine its contours*' (Spivak, as cited in Wisker et al., 2006, p. 86). To be situated anywhere other than within the field of the majority lends itself to increased pressure for first year students and consequently it is an area in which they do not want to place themselves (Wisker et al., 2006). For many students the First Year experience comprises an induction into a mysterious community

of practice. It represents a deep-seated challenge to their social identity and is laden with anguish relating to the unknown experience that awaits them. This research is concerned with the feelings experienced by students when they wish to experience feelings of inclusion and belonging. In this educational context, the sense of inclusion relates to social inclusion. Wisker *et al. (*2006, p.88) define social inclusion thusly:

> *Social exclusion is the term used to denote the exclusion of people or group of people on the basis of various social factors some of which are gender, economic standing, ability, disability, and ethnicity.*

The theme of inclusion and attendant forms of capital permeates this article and contributes largely to its analytical framework.

2.   Research Aim

As educational institutions and educators of these students, we are in some ways responsible for the development and nurturing of these students who are living the experience. Therefore, the principle aim of this research is to make as effortless as possible, the transition from secondary education to third level institutions and identify every opportunity necessary to facilitate course progression and completion, primarily for the future students of the National Bakery School and ultimately for all of the prospective students of the DIT and, in doing so, helps identify some of the causal effects of student attrition.

3.   Research design

The chosen approach to the research project was the use of qualitative research due to its effectiveness when a problem or issue needs to be addressed, specifics expounded, or a phenomenon explored. The real-life context of the degree programme under study presented a focus of inquiry where the recording of the students' experiences would be of help and value in further developing the programme to best support subsequent students. The methodology adopted, therefore, is interpretative research using an exploratory case study incorporating projective questioning and focus group techniques as the methods of gathering primary data, couched in an overall evaluation framework of data encoding.

4.   Forms of Capital

Forms of Capital or theories of capital as used in the study draws on the analogy of different forms of capital as postulated by (Beeton, 2006) illustrated in Figure 1 below.
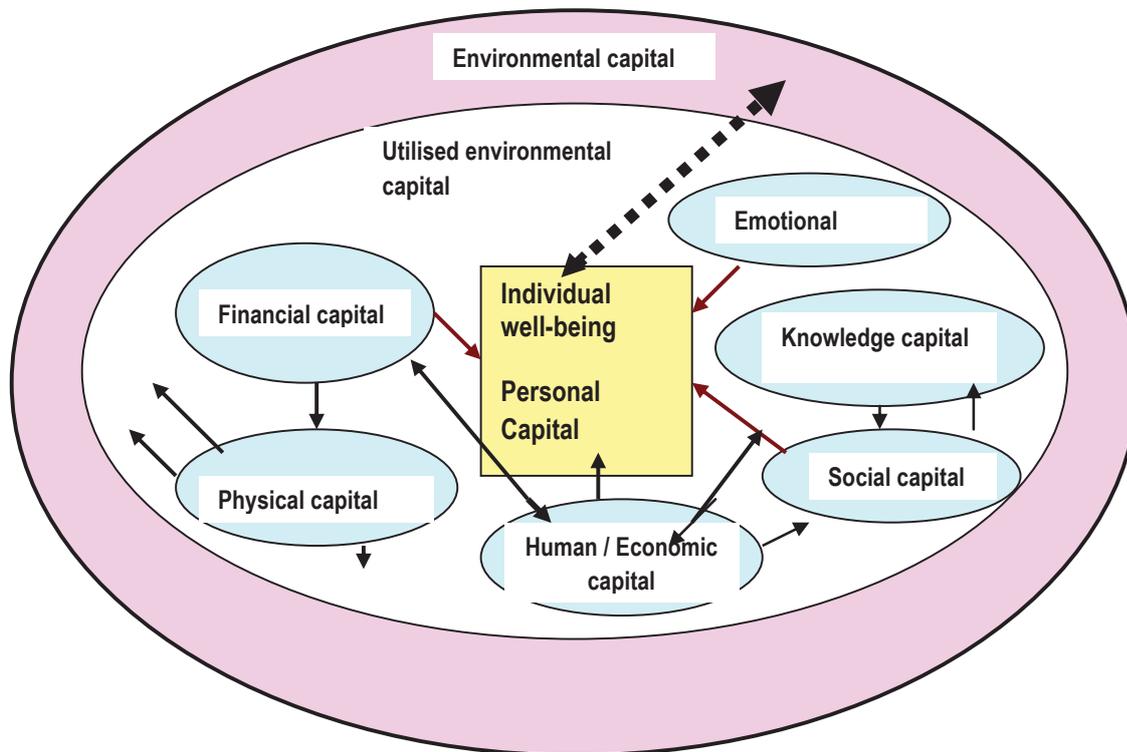
Figure 1: Forms of capital (Beehan, 2006)

In this schema the well-being of the individual represents the focus of personal capital. Inter-relationships of varying intensity and significance operate among a range of forms of capital, most notably emotional, social and financial. Knowledge capital, human capital and physical capital contribute to the context in varying degrees of intensity over time. Environmental capital represents the overall context within which the other forms of capital ebb and flow in relation to the individual.

4.1. Forms of capital in the analytical framework

There are many forms of capital contributing to analytical frameworks. The relational forms of capital addressed in the original thesis framework are concerned with the four most used forms of capital which can overlap in some cases or be broken down into further sub-groups such as emotional capital and physical capital. The four broad forms of capital generally used as categories in the literature are as follows:

1. Human/Economic Capital
2. Knowledge capital
3. Social capital
4. Cultural capital.

In order to discuss forms of capital it is necessary to ascribe meaning to the word *capital*. Capital, in reference to people, is an investment by them in time and education to attain qualifications and / or skills in order to add to human capital. Investment in time by students is usually in parallel with monetary investment by parents or society. The return for this parental and societal investment usually perpetuates itself in the ability of successful students to provide for others in future society (Beeton, 2006). Human/economic capital and knowledge capital are the skills, knowledge and experiences possessed by people gained through education or experience. These are viewed as the future of private and public investment and the source of future growth (Beeton, 2006; Hammersley, 2002; Thornhill, 2001). Douthwaite (2001) espouses human capital as our health, strength and vitality and questions whether our human capital is expanding in a balanced way through the use of our education system.

Social capital is the benefits a person receives from being a member of a family or a community, or by being part of a network of friends (Bordieu, 1977; Coleman, 1988; 1990a; 1990b; 1984; Douthwaite, 2001; Putnam, 1993; 2000). It is the availability of resources based on group memberships and relationships and access to their usage in social networks. Social networks are a measure of community cohesion and the formation of these social relationships enable people to achieve much more as a group than they would independently (O'Brien & O'Fathaigh, 2004). Schaefer-McDaniel, (2004) also notes that close collective communities have greater social capital.

Cultural capital is the knowledge, experience and connections one has gained through life's experiences the transference of which to children is through their parents to be utilised as tools to aid them to succeed in the education system and beyond (Bourdieu, 1977). Cultural capital, therefore, is the transmittance of attitudes and knowledge from the parents to the children as a means of placement in a social class which parents aspire to be the dominant class. Bourdieu (as cited in, Richardson, 1986) sub-divides cultural capital further into three additional types of cultural capital as follows:

   i. *Embodied cultural capital* is both bestowed upon a person through family ideals and acquired through experience. It is their perceived beliefs and ideals.

   ii. *Objectified cultural capital* is the ownership of physical artefacts or things which are viewed as cultural capital only if the owner has embodied cultural capital.

   iii. *Institutionalised cultural capital* is often recognised as academic qualifications and is viewed as the cultural capital held by a person which can be converted into economic capital through the labour market.

a.   *Forms of capital and social reproduction though education systems*

The role of education in reproducing forms of capital and in enabling or preventing access to the various forms of capital is now a well trodden field of analysis in Irish social critique (Clancy **& Wall**, 2000; Kenny, 2008; Lynch, 1989; Murphy, 2006 and 2008). Internationally such critique is particularly associated *inter alia* with Bernstein (1971), Apple (1996)). Essentially this category of capital-related theory argues for meta-awareness among educators of the political role of education structures in affording access to, or denying access to, forms of economic, social and cultural capital which are likely to enable or restrict access to life chances and goods for different categories of students. Theories of capital, as outlined above, were considered appropriate to construct an analytical framework for the primary data. These theories are drawn upon again later as an analytical tool to make sense of the primary data gathered for the research and to frame the conclusions and recommendations arising from the analysis.

Social and cultural capital is significant for understanding the first year experience. Adjustment to college life is linked to having a clear direction, sense of purpose and sense of belonging which may be attributed to the course content researched by the student. It may also be due to the students having a clear vision of a particular career path and the creation of social networks while at college (Matthews et al., 2001). Field (2003, p.1.) says that 'social networks are a valuable asset'. Linkage of the social, cultural and academic aspects of third level education generates a more powerful learning experience through cohorts of learning communities, which in turn leads to a sense of purpose. Israel, Beaulieu and Hartless (2001) equate educational achievement with community social capital and the influence of family.

Educational institutions have recognised learning communities and family encouragement as dual paths to addressing the need for educational engagement and social transition (Tinto & Godsell, 1993). Increased sense of purpose and sense of belonging to a community can be related to participation in social networks, family encouragement and the students' own expectations of education and its necessity in today's society as a form of human capital. Influences outside of College life such as family encouragement can impact greatly on adjustments in the first year. Family encouragement originates from cultural and social capital instilled into the students through the social connectedness of the parents and their children (Smith, 2007).

b.   *Student engagement with the Course programme and peers*

Kuhn (as cited in McInnis, 2003) found that in the United States, engagement of students has become a key focus during the previous five years. The definition of engagement in this context is a commitment or an undertaking. Students put a considerable amount of commitment into on-campus studying in class contact hours, additionally accumulating a considerable number of non-contact hours in the form of self-study. This collectively indicates their level of commitment to their chosen study. Alternatively, another

opposing viewpoint is that in today's society it has been found that students have less commitment to both the academic and social aspects of college life due to their work commitments outside of college to the detriment of their success at third level. Due to commitments outside of college students are unable to give full attention to their education and subsequently it results in a student who is pre-occupied with other elements of life. A Nat West finance poll carried out in Britain in 2003 revealed that students were unable to embark on the financial burden of third level education without working. McInnis (2003) states that in Australia this is not the case because undergraduates tend to work for reasons additional to the demand for basic necessities. The financial implications of attending third level education are very considerable in today's society, the burden of which may be too- great for the family to carry. Circumstances may require the student to part finance their college education. Alternatively, students may desire to maintain a certain lifestyle and therefore will choose to work. Increasingly students are financing themselves through their education by engaging in considerable amounts of paid employment. The impact of this off-campus activity may impact negatively on their academic performance, but there is no research to support this claim as yet. It does, however, infringe on their building of social relationships within college life. Subsequently this creates repercussions for student engagement in course studies, academic performance, social integration and curriculum design for course co-ordinators (McInnis, James & Hartley, 2000). Course design has changed over the years to address changes in society requirements and this has impacted on curriculum design with the delivery of many courses now in modular form leading to a greater degree of flexibility for the prospective student.

4.4 Social capital through new media

Higher education has embraced the notion of student engagement through the encouragement of peer study groups and the introduction and inclusion of multimedia and information technologies as a means of delivering elements of programmes. The increased familiarity with the World Wide Web has led to an upsurge in its use as a tool in researching subject matter and providing other platforms for facilitating course delivery such as web courses and discussion groups. Notwithstanding all this communication technology, students still prefer attendance at lectures as a method of receiving class notes rather than borrowing notes from peers or obtaining them from the web. A survey compiled by UCD in the academic year 1999-2001 showed that 54.3% of respondents indicated a 75% attendance at lectures. It has been found that students who attend college are frequently better at interacting with their peers and enter into discussions more readily with their counterparts and lecturers compared   with those who attend infrequently (Matthews et al., 2001). This is referred to as being part of a learning community and having a sense of belonging.

Kuhn (as cited in McInnis, 2003) proposes the probability that little amount of time involved in study and learning is a determining factor in student disengagement with both the curricula and the social aspect of college life. Active involvement with fellow students outside the classroom is considered social learning and an essential element of enforcing feelings of involvement, which in turn creates feelings of well being which are then reflected in course work achievement and course completion. Therefore engagement with the curriculum and fellow students may be reflected in retention figures.

5. Data from the research

Data were gathered through a survey questionnaire to all first year students in the 2007-2008 cohort and focus groups selected from the same cohort. Questionnaires data were analysed and encoded using thematic analysis. From that analysis 11 themes emerged. The 11 themes initial themes were further reduced into 7 themes and used as questions addressed to the focus group in order to develop a deeper sense of the students' experience. Below is a summary of the data from the survey questions:

Q1. Third level expectations

The main reply was no, as they stated there was an inadequate amount of practical work in the course. The majority of students were not aware of the management element when commencing their chosen degree and expressed a preference for a larger science element and a reduced management level. They want to gain a skill, not become managers. They expressed a desire to attain a degree, but in most cases did not equate any relevance to the discipline of the degree. No thought went into the wage earning bracket in which this qualification would place them.

McInnis (2003) expresses concern at lived experiences not living up to expectations and consequently impacting negatively on students. Expectations that are not met, he says, may give rise to thoughts regarding deferral or course change, as achievement levels are interconnected with expectations. Low achievers experience stronger feelings towards unmet expectations compared to their higher achieving counterparts (Healy, Carpenter & Lynch, 1999).

Q2. Relevance of course content

Answers indicated that some course content was irrelevant as it was aimed at other courses and not at their specific discipline. Insufficient time was allocated to practical classes and there was a general fear of being under skilled in the practical application of their course and being over qualified in an area of little relevance, in this case management. These feelings of disillusionment and course expectations not being met may lead to disengagement with the curriculum which can affect course completion and the academic

experience of education. Yorke (2009) states that in the event of expectations not being met either by the academic component or the social element of student life, students defer or leave their chosen course.

Q3. Progression and non-completion

Some wanted to progress further and are aware of channels to do this, others were unaware of how to progress to other courses within the DIT and one student intended to leave. Both non-progression and non-completion have negative connotations for the social, cultural, economic and knowledge capital of the community (Putnam, 1993; Bourdieu, 1977; Coleman, 1988). The economic capital of the community depends on the knowledge capital and human capital invested by people in their community through the route of education and is seen as the future of private and public investment and the source of future economic growth (Beeton, 2006). The attainment of qualifications also impacts on social class as it is an indication of social standing in the community and is viewed as being part of the dominant class (Bourdieu 1977; Lynch, 1989).

Q4. Induction and sense of Belonging

Students were asked if they found the induction day informative. Answers indicated it was disorganised and should have been held on campus where the majority of classes are based. The duration was said to be too short and students suggested it should be held over a week or more if possible. Induction is part of the transition from second level to third level and is seen as the transition period between both levels of education. It is a period of time for the students to become adjusted to college life and a time to create social networks (Matthews et al., 2001). Field (2003, p 1.) says that 'social networks are a valuable asset'. Induction is a means of becoming integrated into a community of learners. Educational institutions have recognized learning communities as a means of addressing the need for educational engagement and social transition (Tinto & Godsell, 1993). A sense of belonging to a community or network is related to participation in social networks and forms the basis of social capital (Bourdieu, 1977; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). Influences outside of College life such as family encouragement can impact greatly on adjustments in the first year. Family encouragement originates from cultural and social capital instilled into the students through the social connectedness of the parents and their children (Smith, 2007).

Q5. Social and academic aspects of third level education

Students were asked if they had experienced the social and academic aspects of third level education. Responses received signify that they have not engaged in the social element of education other than forming groups within their own cohort. Some students said they were unaware of the existence of clubs and societies and that they were not made aware of their existence during their induction day. They did not envisage this as a problem as they were a small group, but considered it could be of very major

importance if they were part of a large cohort of students. Literature indicates that the social and academic aspects of education are closely linked. Wilcox, Winn and Fyvie- Gauld (2005) identify that the social and cultural aspect of third level education overlaps with, and becomes an integral component of, academic elements of education. Butler and Robson (2003) go on to state the development of skills and the attainment of knowledge increases through engagement with both the social and academic aspects of third level education. Putnam (1995) supports Bourdieu's theory that social networks are important determinants in student academic success and consequently social, cultural and academic support is essential in creating a feeling of inclusion in college life. The greater the sense of involvement in college life, the more academically responsive the student becomes and the more likely the student will persevere and graduate as numerous researchers have pointed out (Malette & Cabrera, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Q6. DIT support services

Students were asked if they found the support systems within the DIT useful. On reflection the majority of students said that they were aware of their existence but they were not very familiar with what services they actually provided. These support services were addressed briefly during the induction day, but the students were not introduced to personnel from these areas or given contact names or numbers for these services.

The first year experience has always elicited interest as a research subject, and currently more so as higher education becomes even more complex with increasingly diverse student groups that require greater support. The necessity for increased support, in turn, affects all aspects of the education system as classes are comprised of a wider range of student abilities due to the wide diversity of students attending third level. All mixes of abilities are present in classes at any one time.

Q7. Enhancement of College experience

Students were asked in what way their college experience could be enhanced. Answers stated the necessity to improve communication in the administration departments between two separate campuses. The students envisage that improvement in this area would reduce unnecessary stress levels encountered in both semesters in first year. They reported insufficient classroom space and ever changing timetables created a negative experience for them. Further more they stipulated a positive college experience would develop through the introduction of more practical elements on the course. Students expressed despair at the inadequate level of craft experience they have gained due to insufficient hours of practical classes. This is further supported by Douthwaite (2001) who states that human capital is increasing with all our educational establishments, but in other areas it is diminishing due to the loss of craft skills.

The majority of students had a close association with someone who had attended or was attending third level education. This is evidence of the investment of family in social and cultural capital. It is the transference of culture to children via their parents as a means of placement in a social class (Bourdieu, 1977). Parental encouragement to attend college is a method of ensuring their children's potential economic capital (Coleman, 1988). Attendance at third level education also gains institutionalised cultural capital in the form of educational qualifications which in turn places them in the desired social class. Social capital based on relationships at home and within a community theoretically helps placement of young people in social networks which enable them achieve more as a group than they would individually (O'Brien & O'Fathagigh, 2004). These social networks or relationships can be used as 'social leverage' to get ahead in life as is stated in Briggs (1998). This scheme broadly illustrates the overall emerging significance of the study findings. These broad findings could be grouped into four summative analytical findings as follows in relation to forms of capital.

6.   Summary of findings

Finding 1

The social and emotional capital of students relates overwhelmingly to networks external to the first year DIT experience. This finding could be interpreted either negatively or positively in relation to the perceived role of higher education in society.

Finding 2

Students were quite clear that knowledge capital and future financial human capital potential were closely related to acquisition of their bakery competence and knowledge through their degree.

Finding 3

The factors that most students regard as essential for academic success are commitment, self-efficacy and the awareness to benefit from newly acquired skills and competences.

Finding 4

Students did not see a direct correlation between being a student in the DIT and their personal identity as a young person or individual adult. In this regard, family and significant others were presented as role models, mentors and sources of financial support even though DIT staff was regarded as friendly and supportive.

7.   Summary of recommendations arising

Finally the research study outlines through its recommendations that the students are generally positive regarding the Degree in Baking and Pastry Arts Management, but have also indicated areas within the course which are negative and require reviewing. These include the following:

- The DIT must be cognisant of the first year experience and strive to make the educational experience of students as pleasurable as possible.

- DIT should consider class sizes outside the context of unit costing and consider the experience of the student.

- Greater emphasis must be put on the integration of students into the DIT educational system in order to ensure they are emotionally and academically coping with third level.

- Each course should be responsible for the induction of its own cohort of students.

- All DIT personnel dealing with students should be introduced to the service providers within Campus Life and be aware of all developments in the area of these services.

- Presentations by support services should be provided periodically or as required and it should be mandatory for all personnel either to attend or be briefed by management regarding developments in these areas.

- Closer collaboration between the social aspects of education and the academic aspects should be encouraged through the introduction of a transition module similar to the freshman year in American colleges.

- Society gains with knowledge capital in both the academic areas and skills areas of education. The DIT must be mindful of this and increase the element of craft skill contained in the Baking and Pastry Arts degree course.

8. Conclusions

i. *Student expectations*

- Student expectations of the course were not being met due to the inadequate amount of time allocated to a skills based subject in the area of practical work.
- The majority of students were not aware of the management element when commencing their chosen degree and expressed a preference for a larger science element and a reduced management level.

- Students want to be craft skilled not managers.

ii. *Relevance of course content*

- Some course content was considered to be irrelevant as it was aimed at other courses and not at their specific discipline.

- Insufficient time was seen to be allocated to practical classes and there is a general fear of being under skilled in the practical application of their work and being over qualified in areas of little relevance such as management.

iii.   *Progression and non-completion*

- Students wanted to progress onto other course after graduation.

- Some were aware of channels to go through to accomplish this others were unaware of how to progress to other courses within the DIT.

iv.   *Sense of inclusion and Induction*

- Students indicated that induction day was disorganised and preferred for it to be held on the campus where the majority of classes are held.

- The induction duration is said to be too short and students suggested it should be held over a week or more if possible.

- They indicated information overload occurred on induction day.

v.   *Social and academic aspects of third level education*

- Students did not engage in the social element of education other than forming groups within their own cohort.

- Some students were unaware of the existence of clubs and societies and indicated that they were not made aware of their existence during their induction day.

- The exclusion from the social aspect of education is not viewed as an existing problem but students considered it could be of very major importance if they were part of a large cohort of students.

vi.   *DIT support services*

- Students were aware of the existence of support systems.
- They were not familiar with the services they actually provided.
- These support services were addressed briefly on induction day but the students were not introduced to personnel from these areas or given contact names or numbers for these services.

vii.   *Enhancement of College experience*

- Students stated the necessity to improve communication in the administration departments between the two campuses where their classes took place.

- The students envisage that improvement in this area would reduce unnecessary stress levels encountered in both semesters in first year.

- They reported insufficient classroom space and ever changing timetables created a negative experience for them.

- Further more they stipulated a positive college experience would develop through the introduction of more practical elements on the course.

- Students expressed disappointment at the inadequate level of craft experience they have gained due to insufficient hours of practical classes.

9. Overall recommendations

The following are recommendations to the DIT to help aid their retention strategy:

- For all institutions the first year experience is a period during which programmes have the greatest impact on student development and persistence. The DIT must be cognisant of this and strive to make the educational experience of students as pleasurable as possible.

- It has been shown throughout the literature that human and knowledge capital is increasing with the abundance of educational establishments available to students, but in some areas it is diminishing due to the loss of craft skills. Society gains with knowledge capital in both the academic areas and skills areas of education. The DIT must be mindful of this and increase the element of craft skill contained in Craft skills course. Alternatively the DIT should introduce a four year honours degree course with a greater emphasis on academic content in the final year leaving the three previous years free to concentrate on craft skills and technology.

- Greater emphasis must be put on the integration of students into the DIT educational system and closer contact with students is necessary in order to ensure they are emotionally and academically coping with third level.

- An extensive induction package should be introduced based on a generic model, but with areas of flexibility in order to be adaptive to different courses. Each course should be responsible for the induction of its own cohort of students.

- All DIT personnel dealing with students in whatever capacity should be introduced to the service providers within Campus Life and be aware of all developments in the area of these services.

- Presentations by support services should be provided periodically or as required and it should be mandatory for all personnel either to attend or be briefed by management regarding developments in these areas.

- Closer collaboration between the social aspects of education and the academic aspects should be encouraged through the introduction of a transition module similar to the freshman year in American colleges. This should act as an introductory module accredited with ECT points

towards the end of year exam. It should consist of social activities alongside refresher courses to align all students' abilities. Students weak in areas such as maths and literacy skills could concentrate on these areas before commencing their desired course.

- Students do not view the size of classes as being an issue at present, but expressed reservations regarding progression to larger sized courses within the DIT. The close association students have with the lecturing staff and their peers was cited as two advantages to being on a course with small student numbers. Feelings of anonymity were said to decrease reducing the tendency to skip classes and class interaction were said to create positive reinforcements to attend classes. DIT should consider class sizes outside the context of unit costing and consider the experience of the student. DIT will gain student numbers if they are perceived as being a caring environment within which to study.

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