

Kaye, Linda K., McCann, Joseph J. and Bates, Elizabeth ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8694-8078> (2017) A snapshot of the student experience: exploring student satisfaction through the use of photographic elicitation. In: 2017 SOLSTICE and CLT (Centre for Learning and Teaching) Conference, 5-6 June 2017, Edge Hill University, Ormskirk, UK. (Unpublished)

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A snapshot of the student experience: Exploring student satisfaction through the use of photographic elicitation

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Overview

To give a brief overview of the background literature on student satisfaction

To give an overview of methodological challenges with exploring the student experience

To report findings on a study exploring the student experience using photographic elicitation

Consider future direction and implications

Student Satisfaction

Described as the result of an evaluation of a student's educational experience; satisfaction results when performance meets (or exceeds) the expectations the student had when entering Higher Education (Elliot & Healy, 2001).

Research suggests student satisfaction is multifaceted - academic quality is important but so is social climate, physical environment and quality of administrative/internal processes (e.g. Jenssen, Stensaker & Grøgaard, 2002)

Current context of HE – student expectations, students motivations (e.g. Bates & Kaye, 2014)

Important for HEIs to respond to students' feedback

Metrics and Measures of Student Satisfaction

National Student Survey – introduced in 2005

Provides indicators of student satisfaction for each UK-based HEI - quality of teaching received, assessment and feedback, student support are denoted and ranked nationally.

Influences recruitment – KIS, UCAS

It has become more important for the student decision making process and the measurement of student satisfaction more generally has become common in HE (Asthana & Biggs, 2007 ; Yorke, 1999)

With the role of the league tables in this national agenda and the increased choice available to students, the NSS is not something any university can be seen to neglect (Buckley, 2012)

Criticisms of the NSS

Student satisfaction is a multifaceted and complex concept (e.g. Temizer & Turkyilmaz, 2012)

Questions lack context and don't account for subject variation (e.g. Buckley, 2012)

Reduces wide range of courses and institutions to a simple metric – with the implication that students are able to make effective comparisons

Do not take into account feelings and emotions as confounding variables (Jurkowitsch et al., 2006).

Pressure forcing foul play with some institutions accused of manipulating and falsifying data (Havergal, 2016)

Measuring Student Satisfaction

NSS is informed governing bodies and policy-makers, not necessarily reflective of the “lived experience” of students

Much of the research that has been done in this area has used questionnaires and quantitative research (e.g. Gibbons, Dempster & Moutray, 2011)

Even more qualitative approaches are still structured and designed from a staff perspective – what we think matters to the students

Photo elicitation - the use of photos within an interview setting (Harper, 2002)

Visual stimulants alters the tone of the interview - prompting emotional connections to memories

It can further lead to new perspectives and explanations of a previously understood topic (Hurworth, 2003)

Aim of the Current Study

The aim of the study was to use photo elicitation to explore what is central to the student experience

We hope to achieve a number of outcomes:

1. Understand the nature of the student experience with a view to enhancing satisfaction
2. Evaluate how effective metrics such as the NSS are for measuring student satisfaction
3. Explore the student experience using qualitative methods that allow the students to control the content of the interview
4. Address issues of power within research; photo elicitation shares values with community/critical psychology, specifically here relating to questioning established power structures (e.g. Fox, Prilleltensky & Austin, 2009)

Method

Students were recruited from the University of Cumbria ($N = 6$) and Edge Hill University ($N = 3$)

Asked to take 5-10 photos that represented their university experience

The photos then guided the interviews with some additional prompting questions:

- 1) Please could you talk through these photos and explain why you chose them.
- 2) How do you think these capture your experience at [your institution]?
- 3) Why is X (depicting something in a photo) an important aspect of you being a student here?
- 4) Is there anything else you want to discuss about your student experience which isn't depicted here

Additionally, asked about the NSS and the content of the questions.

Findings

University and the Learning Community

- Staff
- Cohort dynamics
- Friendships
- Extracurricular activities
- Learning environment

University-Life Balance

- Jobs
- Family and friends
- Deadlines
- Assessment
- Laptops

University Identity

- Feeling part of the wider University community
- Identity as a UoC/EHU student
- Connectedness/Campus Life

Staff



“...they're always accommodating so you always have that input from them and you have that support and it makes you feel secure within your degree “

“...thanks to the staff and witnessing what they do and the amount of effort they put in this fed my interests in Psychology and gave me direction , how could you not want to aspire to that!”

“all of the lecturers are there to give you all the time that they can and I think that that bit is brilliant...like you wanting to get better with them, and they're gonna help with you sort of working together with it cause its smaller”

Friendships

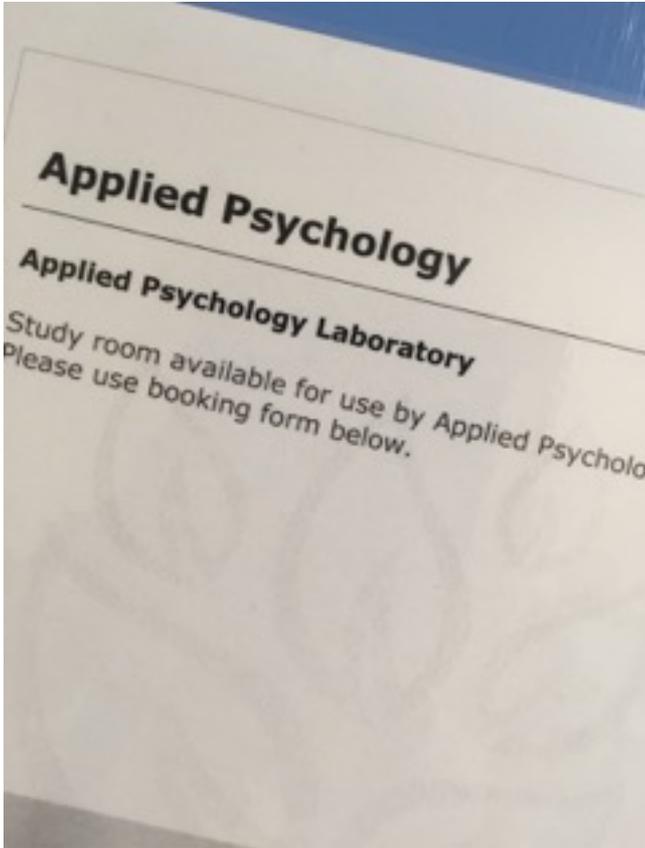


"...everyone sort of says oh well you find your life long friends there and we actually did cause we're kind of a bunch of people who you wouldn't put together...I would never be apart from them"

"I actually really got along with them...when I was in my second year we did like Christmas dinner and we got....like a turkey and everything"

"....shared so much personal experiences even just from the past, not from the present or going forward the the we're so tight knit it's quite frightening actually to think that in a few months we'll all go on our, our own ways"

Learning environment

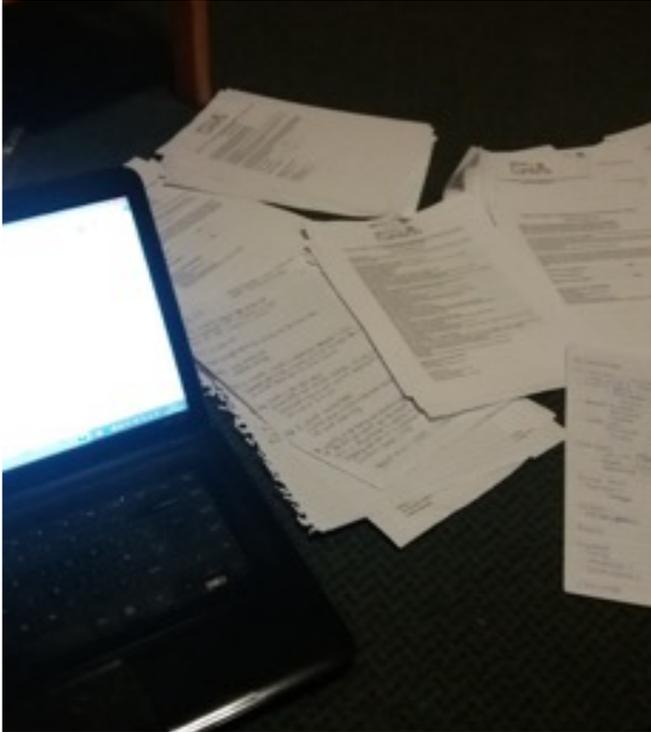


“I feel like I’m more productive like in the psych lab, like I’m more productive in there than at home”

“they’re very helpful, it just makes you feel like not alone when you’re in here”

“the staff in [calva] are excellent with everybody especially when you come in here in your first year, they really go out of their way to try and get to know people...I’m sure that’s probably a common factor across you know the undergraduates courses, certainly Calva is a common place where people can go and have that as an experience, so tea is very important but Calva is...is quite a lot to do with that as well, but that’s the people that have made that what it is”

Assessment



“It is the sort of last sort of last jump is that dissertation, so everything is building up and you’ve got ready and you’ve sort of had your highs and lows and the pressure there but also like the excitement of this is your last piece of work here, this is your three years in this one piece of work”

“The feedback’s the first thing that I look, I look at when results come in...I mean obviously your score’s there and it pops up but I I look more at what what the lecturers have given me as as feedback and advice”

Deadlines

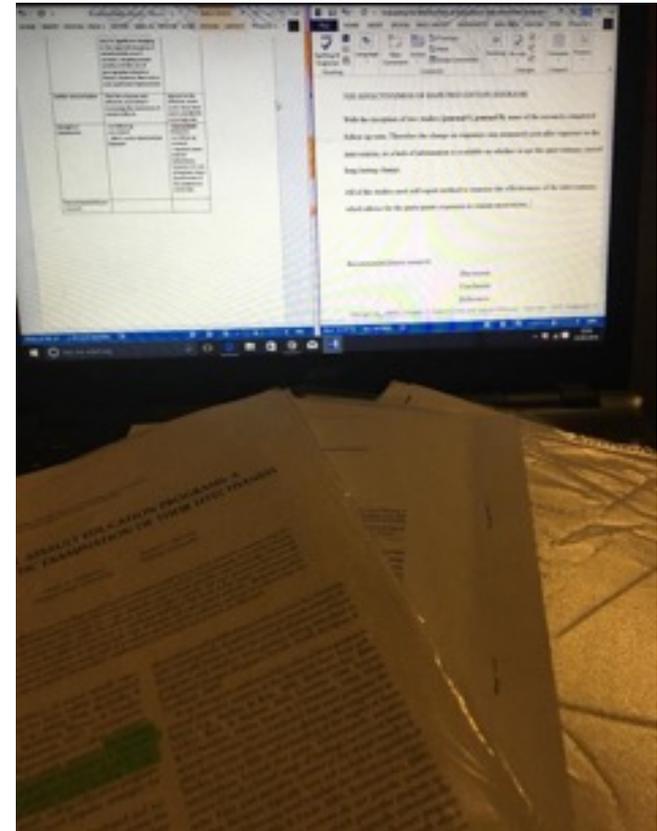
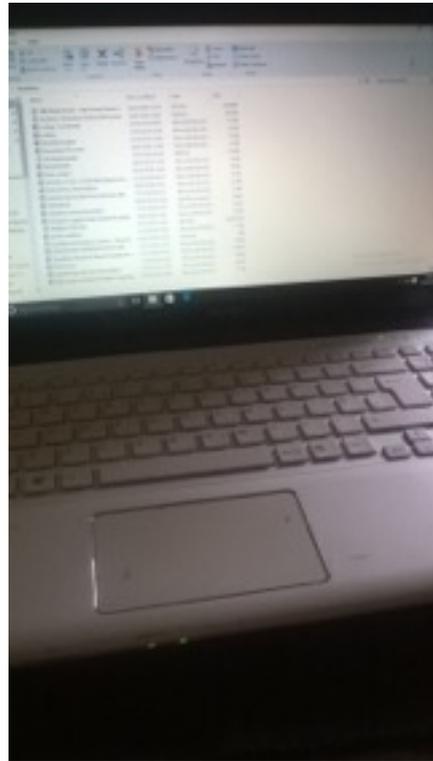


“At like 3 in the morning and you’ve had no sleep, still got the rest of your assignment to do in like 9 hours, it’s pretty handy”

“So she likes to send me messages that just say “tick tock””

“I always start really early, I always start my assignments really early but I always seem to be there the night before desperately trying to get everything fine tuned so I haven’t really improved that much really”

Laptops



Identity and connectedness



"...within being a part of this undergraduate programme I've felt like a part of the university as a whole"

"I do feel part of the bigger picture as well"

"... another sense of community in the actual university there and you've got your group of friends there and everyone will have a nice time there, its just that nice relaxed atmosphere... yeah"

NSS

Students spoke surprisingly positively about the NSS:

“Yeah... erm I think it covered everything it did give you a chance to write a bit which I kind of just said a bit more but... I think you don't want to overly complicated so I think it covered all of the right aspects of uni life...”

“I found it ok because there's whilst there's a set questions and the rated across the 5 to 1 and things, there is scope to expand on that, there's scope to discuss your answer in more detail and you can erm say as much or as little as you want but you can certainly expand”

Implications

Implications for how we measure satisfaction? Internally if not externally?

Implications for how we might foster student satisfaction? Foster social relationships?

Marketing? Attracting future students?

Future Directions and Conclusions

Student satisfaction is complex, multifaceted and a personal experience

NSS seen as “ok” by the students but does not capture all their experiences

Important themes to take forward include connectedness and identity, social aspects of support, community spirit or learning environment – things we are very good at.

Expand to exploring postgraduate provision as PG is neglected in the research literature (*data collection currently taking place*)

Thank you

Thank you for listening!

Any questions?

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