

CHAPTER 3

Mature students' emotional well-being, personal lives and achievements

Chapter learning outcomes are:

After reading this chapter, you will be able to understand:

- the importance of studying the Foundation Degree in Early Years,
 - the complexity of studying at a degree level especially when you need to combine working responsibility and family commitments,
 - the ways mature students manage their emotions,
 - the ways in which mature students' shaped the professional practice as a result of completing the Foundation Degree in Early Years.
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Introduction

This chapter discusses the way mature students who are also practitioners-professionals, see themselves as a valuable resource for children and their families. The term 'mature student' was used to refer to everyone who is 21 years old and above and fully enrolled with the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in the UK and who is eligible to apply for the government maintenance grant and student loan as an 'independent' student (DfES, 2012).

Furthermore the chapter explores possible issues mature students face while studying the Foundation Degree in Early Years (FDEY). Drawing on the case studies of 42 mature students across three HEIs in the SE of England, mature students' experiences were examined

where the focus was on analysing their emotional experiences while studying at degree level. This concept may be a surprising perspective for you, who may expect that the primary focus is on children. However, this chapter gives you an insight to the multi-layered nature of mature students' emotions highlighting the complex issues they face of how to balance the multiple demands of professional work, personal life and academic requirements. It is then linked to their personal achievement in education that enhances the quality of the early years settings which is relational to the value of attending HEIs and gaining a degree. Consequently, the course provided all participants with real depth of relevant knowledge, professional confidence and competence.

The context

In the last decades a large number of students have entered HEIs to study on the FDEY. They were from a wide range of backgrounds (Basit and Tomlinson, 2012), as doors opened to non-traditional students. Through national political initiatives such as the 'Widening Participation' (DfES, 2006) agenda and programmes mounted by individual HEIs, access into higher education has been available for 'non-traditional entrants' of all kinds, including those who missed their opportunity to study when they were younger. What was once seen as the preserve of the young is now rightfully an arena for all and it is in this specific context that

The uncertain terrains of HEIs were temporary. Once the requirements of what is required to complete the course were clear, the feeling of being confident become very strong.

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Conclusion

The data analysed have shown that mature students experienced a real emotional journey. They have described the last three years of their life as a ‘real emotional rollercoaster’ that indicates emotions are very much part of the student life in HEIs. The importance of studying the FDEY had an invaluable impact on their professional practice which was shaped through the debates and active participations in the classroom. For example, sharing good practice in different EY settings helped less experienced practitioners to learn and reflect on their own practice. They also appreciated debates on how to tackle EY related issues such as how to implement new regulations introduced by the government. While the complexity of studying at a degree level especially when you need to combine working responsibility and family commitments was a great challenge, it has emerged that the degree provided all participants with real depth of relevant knowledge and professional confidence and competence.

The study revealed that there is a strong link between emotion, achievement and professional life where emotions were manifested in both positive and negative ways and formed particular emotional climate that influenced participants learning. For example many learners reported that meeting assignment deadline was a real challenge which generated negative feelings and caused tension however, on the other hand, passing an assignment made them to feel proud and knowledgeable which is relational in raising the standard of the EY provisions.

Further reading

Baxter, A. and Britton, C. (2011). Risk, identity and change: Becoming a mature student. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 11(1), pp. 87-104

This article investigates at the stories mature students tell about the risks of higher education, in terms of its effects on identity and the implications for relationships with their families and former friends.

Carney, C. (2001). *The challenge of being a mature student*. Glasgow: University of Glasgow.

This research report offers a detail analysis of the impact on the quality of life and academic work of part-time and full-time undergraduate mature students. From this original report mature students were identified as a group who seem, in general, to have more problems with emotions, social functioning mental health and energy/vitality than students in the younger age group.

Nutkins, S., McDonald, C. and Stephen, M. (2013). *Early Childhood Education and Care. An introduction*. London: Sage

This book offers an excellent insight into early years topics including chapters on the issues of professional autonomy and on personal qualities and interpersonal skills.

Useful web sites:

<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/wp/> - this web site of HEFCE offers an explanation and promotes the opportunity of successful participation in higher education to everyone who can benefit from it.

<https://www.gov.uk/mature-student-university-funding> - this government web site offers guidance for mature students where the government promotes the right to study even if you don't have traditional qualifications.

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Glossary of terms

FDEY Foundation Degree in Early Years

EY Early Years

HEI Higher Education Institutions