

Friendship as method. Understanding student experience through student conversation.

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The project



Friendship as *method* not (yet) used in higher education, despite

- importance to social learning;
- reciprocity of disclosure; and
- young people are 'more themselves' amongst friends;

therefore it has potential for:

- complementing what we derive from surveys
- unwrapping the 'student experience' to reveal richer and deeper insight

UK
Engagement
Survey



Approach taken

- how students explain their own navigation through their studies
- friendship pairs
- guided, recorded conversations
- thematic analysis

By listening to good friends talking, we hear that:

- friendship is central to personal confidence, development and learning
- the influence of family remains strong
- students need good relations with warm and caring staff
- the first year is the most stressful time
- student experiences are shaped by companionship & understanding
- students value being given the space to share experiences through a relaxed and informal setting
 - *'it feels like I have been in therapy!'*
- students value institutional interest in real experiences
 - *'we don't get a chance to talk like this'*
- students can see the positive benefits of reflection
 - *'everything about the past 3 years, all rolled into one. Excellent!'*
- the sharing of experiences is empowering

Project outcomes

Friendship conversations:

- reveal deeper insights than survey responses
- allow students to reveal and / or explain issues of importance
- allow us to re-imagine the 'doing, being, belonging and becoming' journey
- give us the potential to address issues affecting student experience quickly or more tailored to need
- in and of themselves, are valued and enjoyed by the participants

Project applications

- our own Listening Projects (University-, Department- or Subject-wide)
- specific themes / specific cohorts
- longitudinal or quick 'temperature testing'
- unwrap the how, what and why of student experience
- unwrap attainment, retention, satisfaction, aspiration
- of interest to a variety of university stakeholders



Final thoughts

Conclusions

- a method to help us support students better
- better-supported students can improve outcomes
- guided conversations between friends yield depth and detail unobtainable through current measures



Thank you for listening!