Persistence in higher education through student-faculty interactions in the classroom of a commuter institution

Tomás Dwyer

Institute of Technology Carlow, Ireland

Tomás Dwyer, Institute of Technology Carlow, Summerhill Road, Wexford, Ireland, Phone: +353539185815, Email: tomas.dwyer@itcarlow.ie

Tomás Dwyer, DEd, Institute of Technology Carlow, Ireland.

Persistence in higher education through student-faculty interactions in the classroom of a commuter institution

Student-faculty interactions are a component of social integration, a key concept in Tinto's (1975, 1993) theory of student persistence which has received empirical support (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). However, the influence of social integration for commuting students has been questioned (Braxton and Lee, 2005). Furthermore, student-faculty interactions in the classroom are under-researched (Demaris and Kritsonis 2008) and arguably undervalued as an influence on persistence. A questionnaire (n=248), focus groups and interviews with students including those who withdrew from higher education outline the nature of student-faculty interactions and their influence on persistence. The research supports a theoretical focus on the classroom indicating student-faculty interactions including via active teaching could reap persistence and academic benefits.

Introduction

Student persistence in higher education is an issue of real significance to students, higher educational institutions and society (Kezar, 2004). As an illustration The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2010) report a mean completion rate of 69% for the OECD countries and a EU19 average of 70% for those entering higher education. While it is acknowledged there are difficulties in making meaningful comparisons of retention statistics due to differences in higher education systems, definitions of retention and methodologies for calculating the retention rates (RANHLE, 2010) what is not at issue is that there is a problem.

Although the influence of numerous variables on persistence has been recognised the classroom context and student-faculty interactions are under-researched (Demaris and Kritsonis, 2008; Cotton and Wilson, 2006). The purpose of this paper is to highlight the limitations in the literature and to present research that argues student-faculty interactions an aspect of social integration in Tinto's (1975, 1993) model of persistence, can take place in the classroom in commuter institutions.

The study is relevant considering with the changing nature of the student body including a diversification of the population with increased numbers of mature and low socio-economic status students (Schuetze and Slowey, 2002). Furthermore, the student body is less integrated with more students in part-time employment and commuting (Kuh, 2001). In addition, there is a changing landscape for academics with reduced time available to be spent with students due to administrative and research demands (Hoffman, 2014) and an increase in part-time faculty (Percy and Beaumont, 2008). Thus the classroom context becomes ever more important as a point of contact with students and as a potential influence on persistence. As an illustration Cotten and Wilson (2006) in a qualitative study found students have minimal contact with faculty outside the classroom identifying student, faculty and

institutional barriers as to why. Thus students were found to have limited time available, have a degree of insecurity in communicating with faculty and to lack an understanding of the positive impact that student-faculty interactions could have. Furthermore, faculty attitudes were not always perceived positively by students and faculty were found to have a limited time presence. Institutional barriers included poor campus design and facilities as well as academic programmes that did not facilitate interactions.

Literature Review

Tinto's model of student persistence

Student persistence studies are in the thousands with many perspectives utilised to understand the phenomena (Berger and Lyon, 2005). The influence of students-faculty interactions in the classroom is placed within the context of Tinto's (1975, 1993) model of student persistence which has proven highly influential in the field (Braxton, Milem and Sullivan, 2000). Tinto's (1975, 1993) model proposes that students enter college with a variety of personal characteristics, pre-college school experiences and family backgrounds, which influence the development of educational commitments and thus persistence or withdrawal from college. Furthermore, the model proposes that given the prior characteristics of the student, and their prior educational commitments it is the individual's level of academic and social integration into the college that directly relates to new educational commitments and thus to persistence (Tinto, 1975). Tinto's model has been tested in numerous empirical studies which are largely but not unanimously supportive (Brunsden, Davies, Shevlin and Bracken, 2000). The implication of Tinto's model is that if two students with similar backgrounds and similar educational commitments were to enter college at the same time, then the level of academic and or social integration of a student into the college would be predictive of college persistence (Stage, 1989).

Tinto (1975) explains that academic integration refers to the academic standards of the educational institution and the individual's identification with the academic structures of the educational institution. However, early departure has been related more to social integration reasons rather than academic reasons (Harvey, Drew and Smith, 2006).

Social integration refers to the congruence between the individual and the social system of the educational institution. It reflects a student's perception of their congruence with the attitudes, values, beliefs, and norms of the social communities of a college, as well as his or her degree of social affiliation. Social integration has been proposed to occur at an educational institutional level and a sub-cultural level. Social integration can occur primarily through informal peer-group associations, semi-formal extracurricular activities and interactions with faculty and college administrators (Tinto, 1975).

Social integration has been theorised and operationalised as taking placing via non-classroom and/or informal contacts with faculty and has been consistently found to be related to persistence (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980; Tinto, 1975). Similarly, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) and Delaney (2008) outline student contact with faculty members outside the classroom appears consistently to promote student persistence.

Social Integration and commuter students

Stage (1989, p. 385) summarises that 'there is agreement that the model as described by Tinto explains the attrition/persistence process in general'. However, Tinto's (1975, 1993) model has been significantly critiqued including its applicability in different educational contexts (Longden, 2004). One such educational context is higher education institutions that are primarily comprised of students who live off-campus rather than resident on campus, described as commuter institutions. Commuter institutions have less developed social communities and students who have family and work obligations (Braxton and Lee, 2005)

and thus have limited non-classroom contact with faculty. For this reason social integration, and its component student-faculty interactions, have been argued as less relevant for commuting students in comparison to their residential counterparts as an influence on persistence (Davidson and Wilson, 2013-2014; Braxton and Lee, 2005).

However, student-faculty interactions and their relationship to persistence is one that still requires inquiry (Cotten and Wilson, 2006) with existing research not reflecting the diversity of HEIs (Lamport, 1993) including commuter institutions. Much of the research on non-completion in higher education has been carried out in North America where the percentage of students resident on campus differs considerably. Furthermore, research focused on the influence of the classroom and the student-faculty interactions within it on student persistence is limited (Demaris and Kritsonis 2008; Tinto, 1997, 2000). It is this limitation in the research, on student-faculty interactions in the classroom in commuter institutions that is the focus of the present research.

Student-faculty interactions and persistence

The lack of influence of social integration and student-faculty interactions on the persistence of commuting students may not be a definitive. A review of relevant literature could be interpreted as making a case for student-faculty interactions in the classroom influencing persistence.

For example there is a lack of clarity in defining social integration vis-a-vis academic integration. Academic integration has been theorised and operationalised as taking place in the classroom and has been found to influence student persistence in both residential and commuter institutions whereas social integration has been theorised to take place outside the classroom (Tinto, 1975; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980; 2005). However, Tinto's (1997; 2000) later work acknowledges social integration can take place via academic interactions. Similarly, Hoffman (2014) explains that interactions in the classroom between faculty and students are typically

academic in nature but may also have relational qualities. Davidson and Wilson (2013-2014, p. 338) argue academic and social integration factors are 'neither distinctive nor well defined'. The definitional divisions between the social and academic 'spheres' being unclear could be argued as a reflection of the reality of the classroom environment. That is the processes of social integration for commuting students maybe wrapped up in the academic; the academic integration of students may be through the social and vice versa (Tinto, 1997). Demaris and Kritsonis (2008, p. 2) similarly explain '… the classroom is the crossroads where social integration and academic integration convene'. Thus the classroom it could be argued is not only a source of academic integration and thus persistence but also as a potential source of social integration via the academic interactions with faculty.

A further study supportive of the classroom environment as an influence on persistence is a US study by Karp, Hughes and O'Gara (2010) who explain that social integration is often not possible for community college students due to their living elsewhere, work commitments and family obligations. The authors (2010) found that for many students the ability to connect with teaching faculty through classroom discussion was important for developing social relationships. Furthermore, the relationships grounded in the academic environment helped students feel part of the academic community. For community college students academic and social integration were not distinct but intertwined and developed through the same processes. Student-centered pedagogies appeared to help students develop social networks that created a sense of belonging and encourage persistence. Additional studies have also found that the mix of student-faculty contact and active learning influential with respect to persistence (Thomas, 2012; Braxton et al., 2000). Thus academic environments that involve student-faculty interactions rather than are lecturer dominated offer a route to persistence.

In summary, the social integration of students in the classroom with faculty via academic activities and its required interactions appears possible and furthermore could influence student persistence.

Research Focus

The link between the concepts of social integration and academic integration and persistence has been well established. However, the link between social integration and persistence has been questioned in commuter institutions (Braxton and Lee, 2005). More specifically, student-faculty interactions a component of social integration and its relationship to persistence in a classroom context is under-researched (Demaris and Kritsonis 2008; Tinto 2000). Thus the focus of the research is to examine the influence of classroom based student-faculty interactions on persistence in a commuter institution.

Methods

A mixed-methods case study of a higher education institution (HEI) campus with commuting students in the Republic of Ireland was undertaken. The focus of the research on commuter institutions is relevant in an Irish context as almost all students commute from family or rented accommodation to regionally located HEIs. The case study utilised a quantitative survey, focus groups and interviews. Table 1 outlines the research methods.

(Table 1)

Table 1 illustrates research contact took place with students over an academic year as well as phone interviews with students who withdrew from the HEI campus. The quantitative survey questionnaire garnered a response of 248 questionnaires, 62% of the full-time students attending the particular campus of the HEI. Details of the questionnaire tool developed are presented in table 2.

(Table 2)

In the questionnaire the five items utilised to measure the student-faculty interactions in the classroom are adapted from a scale developed by Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) which has found support as a measure of Tinto's theory (Caison, 2007). In adapting the scale the phrase 'non-classroom' was replaced with 'classroom' in three items and 'informally' with 'classroom' in one item. To measure the intentions of students to persist the Educational Commitment scale was adapted from Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) which has been utilised in a significant number of studies of student persistence (Braxton et al., 2000). A pilot test of the questionnaire took place prior to its implementation.

Spearman's rank order correlation, a non-parametric test was used to correlate the scales. Non-parametric tests do not depend on assumptions about the precise form of the distribution of the sampled populations (Bryman and Cramer, 2005). The Cronbach alpha's for the student-faculty interactions scale was .67 and the Educational Commitment scale was .70. Cronbach's Alpha tests the reliability of the scale by measuring its internal consistency or the extent to which all the items in the scale measure the same concept. Nunnally (1978) recommends that the lower limit acceptable for Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.7. With short scales of less than ten, Cronbach's alphas of .5 are common (Pallant, 2001).

The focus groups and interviews were semi-structured in nature and explicitly focused on what influenced the completion motives of the participants. Of the first year students who voluntary withdrew from the HEI campus fourteen students were found to be contactable and agreed to be interviewed. Miles and Huberman (1994) provided a framework for a detailed qualitative data analysis process that can be summarised as involving data reduction via first-level codes and pattern codes, data displays and drawing conclusions. To ensure qualitative data quality the trustworthy criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and objectivity were operationalised in the study (Lincoln and Guba, 2007). To limit bias students who volunteered to participate in the qualitative methods were from a range of

discipline areas and were requested to participate with no prior knowledge of the research. In addition, a personal code of ethical practice informed by relevant ethical guidelines was brought to the research.

Results

There were 248 respondents to the questionnaire. The sample had approximately 70% females, 45% mature students, over 50% were in some form of employment and 80% were concerned about educational finances. As per the research focus all students resided off-campus and thus commuted to the HEI, with over 65% of students residing with their families. Furthermore, students had a bias towards lower socio-economic groups. The demographic data can be argued as a reflection of a changing student body.

The focus of the research is on the influence of classroom based student-faculty interactions on persistence in a commuter institution thus the social interactions of students with faculty were investigated via the questionnaire with Table 3 indicating responses to each of the Likert statements.

(Table 3)

The responses to the student-faculty interactions scale indicate a majority of students were satisfied with the opportunities to interact with staff and the interactions had a positive influence although not all students were sure they had a good 'relationship' with a staff member. The findings in general suggest social integration with faculty in the classroom took place. Significantly, the majority of students indicated the interactions had an intellectual or academic influence thus supportive of the notion of a social academic integration link. Responses to the educational commitment scale indicate a majority of students were committed to the HEI campus as well as higher education.

Student-faculty interactions as outlined in the responses to the scale were investigated for a relationship with the intentions of students to persist via a correlation with the Educational Commitment scale. A moderate positive correlation was found between the two variables (p=<.01 level, r_s=.35 and n=238). Thus, high levels of student-faculty interactions are moderately associated with high levels of educational commitment. The quantitative result can be argued as indicating classroom based student-faculty interactions are related to students' intentions to persist. However, the effect size is limited and the strength of the relationship between the student-faculty interactions and intentions to persist must be understood in the context of multiple factors in the literature impacting on student persistence.

Representative qualitative data will now be presented with the use of pseudonyms that provides an understanding of the student-faculty interactions. In summary, this data could be interpreted as firstly indicating student-faculty interactions in the classroom took place and had an influence on persistence. Secondly, data could be interpreted as indicating student-faculty interactions are linked to the academic development of students.

The positive impact of student-faculty interactions on persistence began from the start of the academic year for a first year mature student Ameila, who explains the positive impact a member of faculty had on her settling in college:

> I didn't talk to any of the lecturers about feeling negative about it [starting college] actually but they just kept being so friendly that I kept [attending], that has helped.

Ameila identifies the faculty as a motivator:

> The lecturers, like I've kind of four main lecturers now and they're very motivating like, their personalities and all.

Similarly, Denise identifies the influence of faculty on her motivation:

… I think that's a big motivation … the fact that the lecturers are so approachable I think that's helpful too like. You know if you're having a problem with something you know you can go and approach them and they're approachable and they will help you. So that helps you along …

A member of faculty theorises how these interactions can motivate students:

The motivation I think is that they do develop relationships with some of the lecturers and they don't want to let the lecturer down in some ways. You know the lecturer has put a lot into their learning, into the outcomes, into the quality of the teaching and they want to stay and for us to be proud of them. I've seen it at graduation.

If student-faculty interaction are an influence on persistence, the opposite that poor relationships and limited interaction with faculty could be a factor in withdrawal. For example, Eddie, was asked what influenced his withdrawal:

… it would be just the total lack of communication between a couple of the lecturers, a couple of the senior lecturers … It's a lack of, just a lack of communication and a certain aloofness.

Tinto (1993, p. 117) similarly highlighted how the presence of interaction may not guarantee persistence but its absence '… almost always enhances the likelihood of departure'.

A focus group comment from an attending student illustrates how student-faculty relationships influence persistence and the academic development of a student:

… I think if you got too bogged down with the course and the assignments and stuff and you couldn't go to someone, couldn't approach someone for help then you would just be likely to say '… I am out the door' but because of the fact that a lot, all of the lecturers are very approachable that you can go to them and ask them … about assignments … I think that is a major key for completing the course.

Similarly, Margaret, illustrates how the student-faculty relationship could motivate and aid academic development:

I find the tutors here very motivating as well, that they are there if you need them and there's no problem and I never had any problems that way, if you need [an] extra bit of help and that does really motivate when you know that there is somebody there to help if you are stuck with anything so.

A faculty member identifies how the social relationships are linked to the academic involvement of students:

We actually get know each of our students quite individually … And I think that makes a big difference because I think they feel, it makes them feel part of a community and they realise that the lecturer is part of that community too. It's an exchange of ideas.

This social academic mix is again illustrated by Margaret a mature student who is positive about an the active teaching approach:

Well most of the tutors here that we have, their, they include the class in everything they are not just standing up throwing the information at you, they are looking for feedback, they are trying to prise it out of you, I like that style of teaching.

Margaret elaborates how an active teaching approach has a social aspect:

… I find the way things are taught here anyway very good, that you're not talked at. You're more included in the way things are being taught. You're opinion is being asked and it's discussed out rather than someone just saying this is the way it is without teaching.

In summary, the results of this study indicate firstly that classroom based student-faculty interactions took place and influence persistence (r_s=.35) being a 'major key for completing'. Secondly, student-faculty interactions were identified as contributing to students' academic development with faculty 'there to help' and the 'relationships' highlight the intertwining of the social and academic processes. Thirdly, student-faculty interactions were linked to active teaching approaches with students 'included' and material 'discussed'.

Discussion

The finding of this research study is that student-faculty interactions in the classroom influence the persistence of students in commuter institutions. This finding is important as the relationship between social integration and persistence for commuting students is not well established (Astin and Oseguera, 2005). The qualitative and quantitative data support an amendment of Tinto's (1975, 1993) model to include the student-faculty interactions in a classroom context as an influence on persistence for commuting students and thus also supportive of Tinto' (1997) later work. With social integration key to student persistence in the early stages of higher education (Harvey et al., 2006) HEIs should strive to make the learning experience of students social.

The student-faculty interactions in the classroom were linked by students to academic development. This academic social integration link supports the literature that argues these processes may not be separate but intertwined (Karp et al., 2010). Furthermore, this finding fits with the classical person-centered education literature that argues that teacher-student relationships are associated with optimal learning (Cornelius-White, 2007). In addition, social interaction adding value to the academic and vice-versa could be argued as important to a student body that has a restricted level of engagement with educational institutions (McInnis, 2001). Thus students need to be encouraged to interact with faculty and vice versa to develop the classroom as an academic and social community. Opportunities could be provided for students to become involved with faculty via expanded induction programmes, field trips, academic advising or student-faculty feedback sessions (Jones, 2008).

Active teaching approaches aided the student-faculty interactions influencing the persistence of students. Teaching approaches that were active involving discussions and 'feedback' were linked to students being 'included'. For commuting students the classroom presents one of the few opportunities to interact with faculty and classmates (Kuh, 2001-

2002). Thus the focus of faculty from early in the first term should be as much on interaction as on education with teaching and learning strategies biased towards being student-centred and interactive (Jones, 2008). Active teaching methodologies can be adapted to large groups through the use of cooperative leaning and adapted lectures (Mulryan-Kyne, 2010) as well as online communities offering a route to increase interactions (Hoffman, 2014).

The influence of student-faculty interactions in the classroom influencing persistence has positive implications for educators, commuter students as well as HEIs. However there are challenges involved in making the learning experience of students social that require commitment on the part of HEI's and teaching faculty and the cooperation of students (Mulryan-Kyne, 2010). However, addressing these challenges identifies a broader commitment required in HEI's. The evidence of this study supports that what influences students to persist in higher education is not retention practices per se but educational practices such as the pedagogical approach and the level of student-faculty interactions. Thus a focus on a student's educational experience could be argued as a cultural commitment on the part of HEI's. The building of educational communities that involve student-faculty interactions can be argued as involving the creation of a culture in HEIs that is committed to students.

Conclusion

The finding of this research study is that student-faculty interactions in the classroom are a influence on the persistence and academic development of students in commuter institutions. The implications of the research demand reflection on opportunities for student-faculty interactions, teaching approaches and class sizes and at a more fundamental level a cultural commitment by HEIs. While the present research is institution specific multi-institutional research with the present focus on student-faculty interactions in a classroom context would add to the body of knowledge.

References

Astin A. & Oseguera L. (2005). Pre-College and Institutional Influences on Degree Attainment. In A. Seidman (Ed.) *College Student Retention* (pp. 245-276). Westport, CT: ACE/Praeger Series on Higher Education.

Berger J. & Lyon S. (2005). Past to Present: A Historical Look at Retention. In A. Seidman (Ed.) *College Student Retention* (pp. 1-30). Westport, CT: ACE/Praeger Series on Higher Education.

Braxton J. & Lee S. (2005). Toward Reliable Knowledge about College Student Departure. In A. Seidman (Ed.) *College Student Retention* (pp. 107-128). Westport, CT: ACE/Praeger Series on Higher Education.

Braxton J., Milem J. & Sullivan A.S. (2000). The influence of active learning on the college student departure process: toward a revision of Tinto's theory. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 70, 569-590. Retrieved from: AcademicOneFile

Brunsden V., Davies M., Shevlin M & Bracken M. (2000). Why do HE Students Drop Out? A test of Tinto's model. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 24, 301-310. doi: 10.1080/030987700750022244

Bryman A. & Cramer D. (2005). *Quantitative Data Analysis with SPSS 12 and 13.* London: Routledge.

Caison A. (2007). Analysis of Institutionally Specific Retention Research: A Comparison Between Survey and Institutional Databases Methods. *Research in Higher Education*, 48, 435-451. Retrieved from jstor: http://www.jstor.org/stable/25704511

Cornelius-White, J. (2007). Learner-centered teacher-student relationships are effective: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research,* 77, 113-143.
doi: 10.3102/003465430298563

Cotten S. & Wilson B. (2006). Student-faculty interactions: Dynamics and determinants. *Higher Education*, 51, 487-519. Retrieved from jstor: http://www.jstor.org/stable/29734993

Davidson C. & Wilson K. (2013-2014). Reassessing Tinto's Concepts of Social and Academic Integration in Student Retention. *Journal of College Student Retention,* 15, 329-346. doi: 10.2190/CS.15.3.b

Delaney A. (2008). Why Faculty-Student Interaction Matters in the First Year Experience. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 14, 227-241. doi: 10.1080/13583880802228224

Demaris M. & Kritsonis W. (2008). The Classroom: Exploring its Effects on Student Persistence and Satisfaction. *Focus on Colleges, Universities and Schools*, 2(1). Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED501268.pdf

Harvey L., Drew S. & Smith M. (2006). *The first-year experience: a review of literature for the Higher Education Academy.* York: The Higher Education Academy. Retrieved from The Higher Education Academy: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/detail/lr_2006_harvey

Hoffman E. (2014). Faculty and Student Relationships: Context Matters. *College Teaching*, 62, 13-19. doi: 10.1080/87567555.2013.817379

Jones R. (2008). *Student retention and success: a synthesis of research*, York: The Higher Education Academy. Retrieved from The Higher Education Academy: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/inclusion/wp/wp_retention_synthesis.doc

Karp M., Hughes K. & O'Gara L. (2010). An Exploration of Tinto's Integration Framework for Community College Students. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 12, 69-86. doi: 10.2190/CS.12.1.e

Kezar A. (2004). Foreword. In Braxton J., Hirschy A and McClendon S. (2004) *Understanding and Reducing College Student Departure: ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report*, 30(3). John Wiley & Sons.

Kuh G. (2001). Organizational Culture and Student Persistence: Prospects and Puzzles. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 3, 23-39. doi: 10.2190/U1RN-C0UU-WXRV-0E3M

Lamport M. (1993). Student-faculty informal interaction and the effect on college student outcomes: a review of the literature. *Adolescence*, 28, 971-990. Retrieved from: AcademicOneFile

Lincoln Y. & Guba E. (2007). But Is It Rigorous? Trustworthiness and Authenticity in Naturalistic Evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 1986(30), 73-84. doi: 10.1002/ev.1427

Longden B. (2004). Interpreting Student Early Departure From Higher Education Through The Lens Of Cultural Capital. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 10, 121-138. doi: 10.1080/13583883.2004.9967122

McInnis C. (2001). *Signs of Disengagement? The Changing Undergraduate Experience in Australian Universities*, *Inaugural Professional Lecture, August 2001*. Melbourne University: Centre for the Study of Higher Education. Retrieved from: http://eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED466720.pdf

Miles M. & Huberman A. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis, An Expanded Sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications.

Mulryan-Kyne C. (2010). Teaching large classes at college and university level: challenges and opportunities. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 15, 175-185. doi: 10.1080/13562511003620001

Nunnally J. (1978). *Psychometric Theory* (2nd ed.). New York NY: McGraw-Hill.

OECD (2010). *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators*. Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development. Retrieved from OECD: http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag2010

Pallant J. (2001). *SPSS Survival Manual*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Pascarella E. & Terenzini P. (1980). *Predicting Freshman Persistence and Voluntary Dropout Decisions from a Theoretical Model*, The Journal of Higher Education, 51, 60-75. Retrieved from jstor: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1981125

Pascarella E. & Terenzini P. (2005). *How College Affects Students* (Vol. 2). San Francisco CA: Jossey-Bass.

Percy A. & Beaumont R. (2008). The casualisation of teaching and the subject at risk. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 30, 145-157. doi: 10.1080/01580370802097736

RANLHE (2010). *Access and retention: Experiences of Non-traditional Learners in Higher Education, An overview of national statistics on retention and withdrawal.* Research into Access, Retention: The Experiences of Non-traditional Students in Higher Education. Retrieved from RANHLE: http://www.dsw.edu.pl/fileadmin/www-ranlhe/files/national_stat.pdf

Schuetze H. & Slowey M. (2002). Participation and exclusion: A comparative analysis of non-traditional students and lifelong learners in higher education. *Higher Education*, 44, 309-327. Retrieved from jstor: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3447490

Stage F. (1989). Motivation, Academic and Social integration, and the Early Dropout. *American Educational Research Journal*, 26, 385-402. Retrieved from jstor: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1162979

Thomas L. (2012) *Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change: final report from the What Works? Student Retention & Success programme*. London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation. Retrieved from http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/retention/What_works_final_r eport.pdf

Tinto V. (1975). Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45, 89-125. Retrieved from jstor: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1170024

Tinto V. (1993). *Leaving College, Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Tinto V. (1997). Classrooms as Communities: Exploring the Educational Character of Student Persistence. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 68, 599-623. Retrieved from jstor: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2959965

Tinto V. (2000). Linking Learning and Leaving: Exploring the Role of the College Classroom in Student Departure. In J. Braxton (Ed.) *Reworking the Student Departure Puzzle* (pp. 81-94). Nashville TN: Vanderbilt University Press.

Table 1   Research methods

Research tool	Sample/Timing
Focus groups	5 focus groups with 24 students at the start, mid-point and end of an academic year
Interviews	10 students interviewed during the academic year
	14 students who withdrew from the HEI campus interviewed post the academic year
	4 teaching faculty interviewed
Questionnaire	248 students responded at the end of an academic year

Table 2   Questionnaire details

Data collected	Details
Demographic data	Relevant factors to provide a profile of respondents.
Student-faculty interaction scale	1. I am not satisfied with the opportunities to speak to and interact with teaching staff in the classroom 2. Since coming to this college I have developed a good relationship with a least one member of the teaching staff 3. My classroom interactions with teaching staff have had a positive influence on my career goals and aspirations 4. My classroom interactions with teaching staff have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas 5. My classroom interactions with teaching staff have had a negative influence on my personal growth, values and attitudes.
Educational Commitment scale	1. It is not important to graduate from this campus 2. I am confident I made the right decision to attend this campus 3. It is likely that I will enroll at this college next year 4. It is important for me to graduate from college 5. Getting good results in assessments is not important to me

Table 3   Questionnaire responses

		Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neither Agree/Dis. %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
Student-faculty interactions Scale	1. I am not satisfied with the opportunities to speak to and interact with teaching staff in the classroom	-	7.1	13.1	57.1	22.6
	2. My classroom interactions with teaching staff have had a positive influence on my career goals and aspirations	15.5	57.1	22.6	3.6	1.2
	3. My classroom interactions with teaching staff have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas	19	57.1	20.2	3.6	-
	4. Since coming to this college I have developed a good relationship with a least one member of the teaching staff	14.5	37.3	42.2	6	-
	5. My classroom interactions with teaching staff have had a negative influence on my personal growth, values and attitudes	2.4	2.4	14.3	46.4	34.5
Educational Commitment Scale	1. It is not important to graduate from this campus	10.0	6.2	14.9	23.2	45.6
	2. I am confident I made the right decision to attend this campus	55.6	28.6	11.6	3.3	.8
	3. It is likely that I will enroll at this college next year	49.2	18.3	13.3	9.6	9.6
	4. It is important for me to graduate from college	82.2	14.1	1.7	1.2	.8
	5. Getting good results in assessments is not important to me	4.6	4.6	8.7	26.1	56.0