

PhD Dissertation Abstract

Bridges (2004) defines a transition as “a natural process of disorientation or re-orientation” marking the turning points of life (p. 3). One such turning point that has recently attracted the attention of higher education is the shift from university to life-after-study. Some universities, especially in the U.S., have developed programmes and courses to help prepare and support students for this transition. However, most of these educational initiatives have been developed without empirical research that explores graduates’ needs. In this research, therefore, I have sought to understand the experiences and perspectives of recent graduates in the post-university transition with the hope that this may inform potential institutional practices.

Twenty young, recent graduates, who were broadly representative of their (U.S.) university’s student population in terms of degree, gender, and ethnicity, were selected to participate in this research. They engaged in recorded, semi-structured interviews and email interviews over a six-month period. Transcripts of interviews were analysed using typical qualitative procedures informed by interpretivism, symbolic interactionism, naturalistic inquiry, and narrativity. Results indicated that despite individual variability, participants shared some common perspectives. Four main themes emerged from the data. Three illustrated the difficulty of the post-university transition (*shifting identities*, *searching*, and *unmet expectations*), but the fourth illustrated how participants used people and resources (*stabilisers*) to foster support and balance in their transition. Furthermore, participants offered a range of suggestions about ways their institution might help graduating students better prepare for this transition and life-after-university. Recommendations based on these suggestions provide ideas for *career preparation*, *emotional support*, and *practical life skills* that institutions might choose to implement.