



Image audio description



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Copy of poster

“We want to be educated, but we have a life.”

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A ‘response art’ (Fish, 2019) collage produced whilst investigating part-time distance learners’ experiences of unplanned deferral.

Materials selected represent:

- student aspiration to develop themselves (all materials repurposed)
- concept of social mobility (text change: black paint - gold vinyl)
- Precarious nature of part-time studentship (unravelling knitting)
- variable engagement with study over time (purple strand in yarn)
- typical community in which students are situated (newspaper clippings)

Interviews with 16 Open University students gathered data on experiences of deferral. Those without prior HE qualifications (n=10) described social resistance to their studies. Desire for change is a rejection of the status quo (Maris 1974), therefore education may threaten power relationships within a family or community. Students spoke of tension between prioritising study and social expectations, particularly when faced with illness, bereavement, relationship or employment issues.

Prior research suggests student retention is contingent on assimilation into an institution (Tinto 1993, Thomas 2002). However, few studies have fully considered how external responsibilities impact part-time learners, causing frequent short interruptions and sometimes leading to deferral.

This study explores the complexity of managing part-time study using Schlossberg’s transition theory (1981). Participants expressed a desire to continue studying but needed more flexibility, to accommodate demands from other areas of their lives.

Fish, B. J. (2019) ‘Response Art in Art Therapy: Historical and Contemporary Overview’, *Art Therapy*, 36(3), p 122–132

Marris, P. (1974) *Loss and Change*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge and Kegan

Schlossberg, N. k. (1981) ‘A Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition’, *The Counselling Psychologist*, 9(2), p 2–18

Thomas, L. (2002) ‘Student retention in higher education: The role of institutional habitus’, *Journal of Education Policy*, 17(4), p 423–442

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