

‘That social side of things’: Students’ experiences of social and physical place

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This paper highlights the experience of social and physical place as experienced by students at a TAFE (Technical and Further Education) college in Victoria, Australia and TAFE diploma graduates who transitioned to a degree course at a university in Victoria, Australia. Drawing on narrative, one-on-one interviews as well as focus groups, personal perspectives on experiences of physical and social place are discussed. Data collected showed that students perceive status hierarchies between TAFE and university physical and social spaces, and this impacted on a sense of identity and belonging for some students. Some students problematized these differences, enabling a more nuanced understanding of how students experience both environments. Implications of the findings with respect to broader, urgent questions about how the Higher Education (HE) and Vocational Education and Training (VET) sectors can contribute to meeting the federal government’s ambitious goals for low-SES access to and retention in HE are discussed. The research setting was site-specific, constructed around a partnership between the regional Australian university and the TAFE, enabling issues of place to be foregrounded.