Teaching in the context of diversity: Reflections and tips from educators at King’s College London
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Seven Practitioners’ Tips for Teaching in the Context of Diversity
Editorial

Anna Mountford-Zimdars

Dear Colleagues,

Our students in higher education and at King’s are more diverse than ever before. How does this affect how educators reflect on their role of supporting student learning in higher education? What are the opportunities for drawing on the strengths of diversity in a classroom? How can technology be embraced to enhance learning for diverse students?

The eight contributors to this special issue have thought about what diversity, or the lack of diversity means in their teaching contexts. In addition, the Centre for Technology Enhance Learning (CTEL) has provided an overview of how the present special issue has been made accessible. All contributors work as educators at King’s College London. Their contributions to this special issue describe their own practice and initiatives to enhance student learning in the context of diversity. Their reflections and reviews are honest, insightful, and thought-provoking.

Students at King’s come from as far afield as New Zealand and China as well as our local community in London. They come from different cultural, national, and social contexts; some consider themselves disabled, some not; some students are returning to study after a break or as graduate students, many undergraduate students continue straight from secondary education. Some students prefer learning by doing, others prefer learning by listening, observing or reflecting. Our students come with different expectations and abilities to navigate the complex space of higher education curricula, they have had different educational journeys to reach the point of embarking for study at King’s, they have different commitments outside of studying and different levels of support from friends and families for their studies. Students might live with family members, in halls of residence or privately, they may or may not engage vividly in the extracurricular activities at King’s.

The educators at King’s are themselves a diverse group of nationalities, cultures, teaching philosophies and technophilia; united by underlying motivations for having chosen to work in higher education. Both educators and students are still learning to negotiate their roles and expectations of each other in the recently marketized higher education system. Simultaneously, technology is advancing rapidly. Lecture capture is widely available and King’s is experimenting with open online course. There are new, innovative ways to engage students with a range of learning styles, preferences and abilities in an inclusive, universally designed classroom.

The present collection of eight essays shows how educators are thinking of the diversity in their teaching contexts. The essays were originally submitted as assignments for the option module ‘Teaching in the Context of Diversity’ which is part of the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice at King’s Learning Institute. Eight participants with particularly insightful submissions within the two preceding years (2013 and 2014) have enthusiastically agreed
to be part of this special issue. They have taken the feedback from their original assignment as well as additional comments from King’s colleagues to further enhance their original submissions. Half of the eight pieces in this special issue are reviews and the other half are reflective case studies. The reviews focus on reviewing the literature in a field and linking it to practice whereas the reflective case studies start with the author’s own practice and then link it to the literature. Each piece concludes with author’s top tips for supporting teaching in the context of diversity. The seven top tips from all educators are summarised in the final section of this special issue. It is with great pleasure that I now introduce the individual pieces.

The first essay by Teresa Elmes introduces and reviews the idea of cultural capital. Elmes uses the concept of cultural capital as a lens through which to understand participation and non-participation in higher education as well as a lens for understanding how students choose particular institutions and courses. She then relates the theoretical review of the literature to her own practice working with students in the ‘grand neo-gothic Maughan Library’ that is part of King’s Library Service’s offerings. Elmes argues that differences in cultural capital continue to matter while students are in higher education. This can affect their comfort levels, their understanding of tacit information and the hidden curriculum that allows students to navigate the language and culture of higher education and how well students can meet unarticulated expectations. Different cultural background can also give insights into the approach to citing other people’s works. Elmes links those insights back to her own personal experience of higher education as well as showing how these insights provide an opportunity to address barriers. Her top tips for teaching in the context of diversity include explaining unfamiliar terms, making students aware of available support, providing clear instructions, and consciously taking into account students’ prior knowledge.

The second essay is a reflection by Matthew Moran on the challenge of peer-labelling in his teaching practice of leading a course on riots. Moran and other educators in the field of international security studies are no strangers to covering controversial and emotive issues and conflicts. However, the relationship between race and the London riots of 2011 developed an unexpected dynamic in Moran’s own classroom when a student began to feel that his classmates were making an implicit link between him, his race, and the riots. Drawing on labelling theory, Moran makes sense of the observations in his classroom. He considers how educators might plan their teaching to incorporate thinking about the possibility of peer-labelling and stereotyping occurring as well as planning for harvesting the benefits of diverse classes and instilling a broad world-view and an appreciation of diversity among his students. Moran’s top tips include challenge assumptions from the outset and drawing on diversity as strength in the classroom.

Jeff Garmany’s essay begins with a perceived ‘lack of diversity’ among his students. Garmany had developed a module on the cultural geography of Brazil and was hoping to cover potentially controversial issues such as slavery, domestic violence, religion, environmental degradation and the socio-cultural construction of race and gender. However, it turned out that all participants in this course were white and male and Garmany was concerned that this lack of observed diversity among students would hinder constructive discussions. His review of the benefits of diversity in higher education highlights how reflective teachers can draw
on diverse perspectives participants bring to classroom conversations as strength; although Garmany also acknowledges the potential additional preparation and thinking time required in drawing on this strength. However, in his classroom, Garmany found that the lack of observed diversity among participants hindered discussions a lot less than he had expected with students happy to critically engage in a range of controversial discussions. This, in turn, leads Garmany to consider how he might have under-estimated the actual, non-observed diversity among students that is not easily reducible to skin-colour or gender. Heterogenous insights can thus be gained from learning groups that might appear homogenous on the surface. Crucial in the success of a discussion-based classroom is the teacher and his or her ability to lead discussions where students can voice and critically evaluate a range of perspectives and views.

In the fourth essay, Deborah Chinn’s addresses the frequently neglected issue of students in higher education who also have caring responsibilities. For these students, the choice of university and course is often influenced by their caring responsibilities with limited geographic mobility and some restrictions on the course requirements they might easily be able to combine with their role as carer. Carers might feel more isolated on campus and are time poorer than their peers without caring responsibilities. Chinn describes the support available and recommendations for supporting carers in higher education, including the need for staff training and a positive framing of the contribution carers can make to the learning for others as well as the potential for online or remote learning for carers. The essay highlights how there is great scope for universities to expand their commitment to carers and to develop further formal policies and support in this area. Chinn’s top tips include reflection of teachers’ own assumptions about caring and a readiness to challenge those, elearning support and reflecting caring in the curriculum.

Sonya Lipczynska reflects on how best to create accessible learning materials that allow students with undisclosed disabilities to fully participate in her training sessions. She situated the piece in the context of her practice as an information specialist in Library Services. As part of her role, Lipczynska delivers a training sequence helping dental students prepare for a poster project. While the Library Service has a range of formal support available for students with declared disability, Lipczynska highlights how some students have an undisclosed disability and how an inclusively designed session can meet those needs as well. After reviewing the literature, she adopted a range of teaching practices to enhance inclusion. The changes ranged from avoiding jargon to providing material in different formats, to having a clearly signposted lesson plan. The essay highlights how small and thoughtful changes that are possible for any practitioner can enhance accessibility and inclusion in teaching. Lipczynska’s top tips include making material available before the session, using a range of teaching techniques and not making assumptions about students’ backgrounds and abilities.

The six essay is a review of the teaching modes available to support epilepsy as an unseen disability in the context of teaching Comparative Literature. Maria Vaccarella observes that neither the social nor the medical model of disability exhaustively explain what happens in epilepsy. Epilepsy has low levels of disclosure. Vaccarella argues that supporting students with epilepsy needs to be a combination of individual support and a move towards universal design. She cites examples of innovative practices ranging from living arrangements to financial
support. The essay concludes with a reflection on how learning about epilepsy has impacted Vaccarella’s own approach to teaching by aiming to remove barriers to learning. Changes, or anticipatory adjustments, include making material available before the lesson, providing a glossary of new terms and providing enough information in written material so that students can undertake tasks remotely and thinking about audio-visual recording of sessions.

Clare Crowley’s reflection concerns information literacy needs of distance learning medical students. One face-to-face session supports the information literacy skills of the students who otherwise learn remotely. In this practice context, it is key to flag up the support and resources available to students, to collaborate with academic faculty to encourage use of resources and to have informative and accessible online resources. After reviewing the literature and consultation with students and academic faculty, Crowley developed an interactive online module with quizzes and modular tutorials with linked videos as well as a new Medical Subject Guide. Crowley’s top tips include blended learning, using a range of delivery modes and activities, using screen capture and continually evaluating one’s own practice in light of feedback. The essay also highlights the importance of linking up activities and communicating with users and other educators about the available resources.

The final essay by Vivian Auyeung reviews the development and running of a massive open online course (MOOC) in Medicines Adherence. Auyeung describes a range of issues that are particular to the context of MOOCs such as the high enrolment but comparably low completion rate, the variability of student engagement, and the ongoing discussions about how to make MOOCs sustainable. Auyeung reports that MOOCs have a tendency to increase the knowledge of those who are already highly educated and do not always succeed in reaching new groups of learners. The essay concludes that MOOCs on their own are unlikely to be the solution to enhancing access to education and because of their large enrolment, personal support for weaker learners is not usually a feature of these programmes. However, future developments to enhance MOOCs might make them one option for accessible learning. A top tip for inclusive MOOCs is to transcribe video material and to offer a range of ways for accessing materials.

In working with participants in the ‘Teaching in the Context of Diversity’ module, I was humbled by the thoughtful and reflective dedication of my peers in enhancing the educational experiences of all students. The essays, the individual ‘top tips for inclusive teaching in each contribution, and the collected ‘Seven Practitioners’ Tips for Teaching in the Context of Diversity’ at the end of the present special issue provide an unusual resource for educators within and outside King’s for making their practices more inclusive and accessible.

I hope you will enjoy reading this special issue and the ideas and tips for inclusive teaching shared here.

Anna Mountford-Zimdars
guest editor

Anna Mountford-Zimdars
How this publication is made accessible

Paul Gillary

The theme of this special edition of the HERN-J is ‘Diversity’. I have been asked to contribute to this by providing the means to make this issue accessible to everyone no matter what their abilities. Typically many academics and institutions will provide a PDF document that is easy to read and use in combination with assistive technologies (AT). There are many types of AT but here I’m specifically referring to screen readers, magnifiers and text-to-speech. These convert written words to audio or enlarge text to read. These are software based solutions for computers. Both iOS for Mac and Windows for PC already come with some of these features built-in. Commercially available software can be expensive so not everyone will use these technologies. Is it enough to provide different formats for readers though? Maybe, maybe not!

So in the interest of improving upon accessibility even more, we are going to do a number of things. Firstly, there will be at least two PDF versions that will be developed from MS Word. I know what you’re thinking, ‘MS Word!’ One of the good things that I’ve found recently is the accessibility checker that is built into MS Word. It is very useful. I suggest everyone uses this to make their learning resources accessible. The Microsoft Accessibility Checker will evaluate your document for issues and provide a list of results for you to resolve including; missing page/slide titling, missing ALT text (alternative text), incomplete tables, meaningful links, audio/video captions and reading order. To use the Accessibility Checker in Word, PowerPoint and Excel simply click File > Check for issues > Check Accessibility.

As well as an identical PDF of the final print version, one of the PDFs we will produce will be a large-font double-spaced version for easy reading. Just like the large print books you can get from the library. This will hopefully resolve the need for magnifying software, while retaining the readability of a book. Some magnifying software increases the size of the page but then adds horizontal scrolling for text which is no longer visible on the screen. I do not want to add accessibility with one hand and the take it away with the other. A large print version should solve this issue.

Included in this issue are also short biographies of all the contributors, which you do not always get in these types of publications. This will give you more insight into the author and provide a better context for you when reading the paper. I’m not just focusing on the physical accessibility of the HERN-J but also the context of this issue and the authors too.

The HERN-J website will also be used to add to the accessibility of this issue. For the first time in the history of the HERN-J there will be a video abstract of the special issue presented by the Editor, Dr Anna Mountford-Zimdars. I hope these will provide a concise but easy method for reader to get an overview of the papers in this issue. The captions provided make the video-abstract accessible for those with hearing impairments.
We will also raise awareness of the special issue through contributor presentation at the annual Excellence in Teaching Conference at King’s, King’s disability service, professional networks like the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) and through encouraging other participants on Academic Practice development programmes to engage with this special issue. Again, we are taking an inclusive view towards accessibility to include the content and dissemination of work.

If there’s anything more we can do to improve the accessibility of the HERN-J special issue further, I’d be very happy to hear your suggestions. You can contact me at Paul.Gillary@kcl.ac.uk

Happy reading!

Paul Gillary
Author Biographies

**Anna Mountford-Zimdars**
I teach and research issues in higher education at King’s Learning Institute and in the Department of Education and Professional Studies. My research broadly concerns issues of equity and fairness in university admission and progression. My teaching includes leading on the support for newer teachers (Graduate Teaching Assistants). I developed the module ‘Teaching in the Context of Diversity’ and the present special issues with the hope to integrate research with practitioners’ reflections. The ultimate aim of this endeavour is to translate insights into sharing and enhancing inclusive educational practices.

**Paul Gillary**
I am currently a Learning Technologist in the Centre for Technology Enhanced Learning (CTEL) at King’s. My work ranges from providing advice and support to staff and students, to giving Continuing Professional Development workshops covering a range of topics including ‘Creating Accessible Learning Resources. I provide support for the King’s Learning Institutes module ‘Supporting Technology Enhanced Learning’ and give workshops on how to create ePortfolios with Mahara. In addition I also develop useful resources to support the use of learning technologies at King’s.

**Teresa Elmes**
As a Library Liaison Manager in the Partnership and Liaison team in Library Services I’m responsible for supporting the faculty of Arts & Humanities, the English Language Centre, the Summer School and Study Abroad. My role involves liaising with staff and students, gathering feedback on the Library’s resources and services, to ensure that we meet their teaching, learning and research needs. I use a range of communication channels to ensure that staff and students are up to date on the latest tools and support available. I’m interested in issues of access to higher education and developed library sessions for A-Level history students as part of a widening participation initiative.

**Matthew Moran**
I am a Lecturer in International Security and Deputy Director of the Centre for Science and Security Studies, a research centre based in the Department of War Studies. My research interests span a range of security-related issues, from the nature and causes of public disorder to nuclear non-proliferation. I received my first degrees from the National University of Ireland, Galway and I hold a PhD from University College London.
Jeffrey Garmany
I joined the King’s Brazil Institute in 2011 after completing my PhD in geography at the University of Arizona. In the most general sense, my work lies in political and urban geography. I teach graduate modules on topics of globalisation and development, political ecology, Brazil and Latin America, and social science research design. My research investigates questions of uneven development and political governance in northeastern Brazil, and contributes more broadly to theoretical debates surrounding State theory, critical development, policing and space, and urban and rural poverty.

Deborah Chinn
I worked for many years as an NHS clinical psychologist in community teams for people with intellectual disabilities. A few years ago I combined my clinical role with a lecturer’s post at King’s in the School of Nursing and Midwifery. I’ve been involved in teaching and supervising students, mainly in the areas of qualitative research methodology and child and community mental health topics, but I’m now focusing on research as I’ve received an NIHR fellowship to look at how people with intellectual disabilities are offered and make sense of health information. I have an ongoing interest in disability studies, health inequalities and how social theories inform research.

Sonya Lipczynska
I am a Library Liaison Manager at King’s responsible for supporting the learning of students in the Faculty of Life Sciences. I teach classes on enhancing search skills for systematic review projects, approaching literature reviews and managing references. In 2013 I passed the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice which enabled me to reflect critically on my teaching practice and make changes based on learning and teaching theory. As a result of this, I am currently developing elearning tools for students to access at the point of need, reviewing teaching materials to ensure that they are accessible for all, and investigating the possibility of introducing formal assessment in library classes.

Maria Vaccarella
I am a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Medical Humanities at the Centre for the Humanities and Health, and I also teach for the Department of Comparative Literature. My research focuses on cultural responses to medical issues, especially chronic illness, cognitive impairment and disability. I teach contemporary literature and critical theory at both undergraduate and postgraduate level (e.g. my self-designed module ‘Narrating Illness across Cultures’). I am currently coordinating the project ‘Staging Transitions’ (supported by King’s Cultural Institute) with Face Front Inclusive Theatre, a company of disabled and non-disabled performers: we are developing a research-informed, inclusive and interactive play for and with young people with learning difficulties and disabilities, on the topic of their transition from school to adult life.
Clare Crowley
I’m the Library Liaison Manager for the Faculty of Life Sciences at King’s, developing liaison and partnerships between Library Services and the Faculty. I have extensive experience of providing teaching and support for students and staff on topics such as searching for systematic reviews, bibliographic software, database searching, critical appraisal, referencing and avoiding plagiarism. I’ve recently completed the Postgraduate Certificate of Academic Practice in Higher Education with the King’s Learning Institute.

Vivian Auyeung
I am a Psychologist based in the Institute of Pharmaceutical Science. My research focusses on understanding medicine-taking behaviour, specifically the factors that influence patient medication adherence such as the beliefs about their condition and treatment and their information needs. My teaching includes leading on consultation skills and behaviour change workshops plus lectures on medication adherence to undergraduate and postgraduate students across the Health Schools at King’s.
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Review: Higher education admissions and success: What is the value of cultural capital?

Teresa Elmes
Library Services

This essay explores the issue of ‘cultural capital’ and its importance for different social groups in Higher Education (HE). I was introduced to the idea of ‘capitals’ by the Diversity module on the PGCAPHE and an article on social capital by Coleman (1988). As a teacher of library skills, with a background in Arts and Humanities I was not familiar with the concept but found it to be persuasive. My interest was consolidated through reading Zimdars et al on elite admissions (Zimdars, Sullivan & Heath, 2009). As the first-generation in my working-class family to attend university, the issues resonated and I was prompted to consider the potential value of cultural capital for different social groups in admissions and also the student experience.

My reading of the literature has reminded me that my academic path is typical for my background; attending a state school followed by a local Further Education college and a local polytechnic to study an arts subject. Exploring the issue of capitals has prompted me to reflect on my decisions at 16+ and how these may have been shaped by the limited educational value of the cultural capital that I possessed. However it has also prompted a consideration of the value of the capitals in my possession which made university a possibility at all. My Irish Catholic family lacked knowledge of HE but provided an awareness of different cultures, enhanced by supportive parents, a community network and an encouraged love of reading. Considering my educational path and the contrast with teaching at King’s has been fascinating.

Factors affecting the admission of students into HE and their experience while studying are numerous and complex. It is difficult to isolate an individual influence such as cultural capital, however research and writing in this area strongly suggests the value of this to be significant.

Theoretical overview
The origins of the concept of cultural capital belong to the work of Bourdieu on schools in the 1970s. Since then international researchers have commented upon, utilised and refined the theory. Although there have been numerous and varied interpretations of Bourdieu’s concept, I find his definition (interpreted by Zimdars) of ‘familiarity with the dominant culture in a society’ (Bourdieu, 1984) to be a helpful overarching one.

Cultural capital is one of the numerous inter-related capitals in play in educational choices: eg, human, body, physical, social, economic, educational and symbolic. This entanglement of capitals is perhaps one reason why researchers have proposed a multitude of definitions of cultural capital. Lareau and Weininger produced a useful review of definitions in 2003.
Covering three decades of research (with most studies focusing on schools), beginning with DiMaggio in the 1980s (DiMaggio, 1982), they summarise the different elements and theories proposed by researchers.

While many studies focused on participation in elite cultural activities or ‘beaux arts’ (visits to the theatre, museums, art galleries, concerts and dance events, playing an instrument) (Katsillis & Rubinson, 1990), other work has encompassed a wider range of components or activities. Some have explored possession of cultural objects (e.g. paintings), while others focused on personal elements such as language and interpersonal skills, attitudes and behaviours, dress, taste and manners (akin to Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’) (Zimdars, Sullivan & Heath, 2009; Sullivan, 2001). Perhaps the most relevant consideration for me is the inclusion of reading habits (Robinson & Garnier, 1985; Sullivan, 2001; Noble & Davies, 2009). Zimdars (Zimdars, Sullivan & Heath, 2009) found that the possession of information and knowledge of culture (reading and understanding) and not just participation in cultural activities is key. In contrast the Great British Class Survey study launched by the BBC in April 2013 has a strong focus on participation in cultural activities to determine levels of cultural capital as an indicator of social class.

Recent studies have moved away from a focus on beaux arts participation to explore a range of activities including TV, radio and newspaper consumption (Noble & Davies, 2009). Additionally work has reflected the importance of IT, digital technologies and the internet (Harrison & Waller, 2010; North et al, 2008). There has been much debate and some disagreement over the value of these different elements as components or measures of cultural capital (Harrison & Waller; Noble & Davies, 2009).

From my reading there appears to be greater consensus on the differential possession of cultural capital by certain social groups and its currency for progression in education. Researchers recognise that individuals from different backgrounds have varying amounts and types of cultural capital. Only dominant or elite forms are rewarded by the education system, contributing to a reproduction of inequality. It is broadly accepted that ‘traditional students’ (white, middle-class, from private schools, with educated parents) possess the highest levels of this capital; while lower levels are possessed by ‘non-traditional students’, (working-class, certain ethnic minorities, from state schools, whose parents have not been to university). I am using these broad terms (traditional/non-traditional, working-class etc) but appreciate that they are not fixed or universally agreed.

This piece focuses on the link between cultural capital and social class, with particular consideration of first-generation attendees, however includes references to gender and ethnicity where helpful. It is worth acknowledging that focusing largely on socioeconomic group has limitations. Museus and Griffin highlight a need for HE studies to consider ‘intersectionality’ (2011) or according to Shields ‘the processes through which multiple social identities converge and ultimately shape individual and group experiences’ (2008). Museus and Griffin argue that considering the inter-related factors of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class and religion ‘promotes a greater understanding of how converging identities contribute to inequality’ (Museus & Griffin, 2011).
Certain forms of working-class cultural capitals can be seen to conflict with education. Coleman’s work on social capitals recognises that ‘A given form... that is valuable in facilitating certain actions may be useless or even harmful for others’ (Coleman, 1988). Hutchings found that working-class and black male youth culture was opposed to educational culture (Hutchings, 2003) and Archer’s later study similarly found that working-class girls used ‘heterosexual femininities’ to invest in cultural capitals which were in opposition to those valued by their school (Archer et al, 2007).

Comparable work has identified how the cultural capital of certain ethnic minority groups has limited value in education. In a study of ethnic minority students DeWitt et al suggest that families were unable to transform support of their children’s schooling into the ‘symbolic cultural capital’ required for success (DeWitt et al, 2011). They cite Blackledge who considers Bangladeshi mothers reading Bengali texts with their children. Although a positive educational activity, it offers no reward in British education (Blackledge, 2001).

Archer helpfully summarises cultural capital as ‘the knowledge, language and culture, differentially accessed and possessed, that guides the decisions made and actions taken’ (Archer at el, 2003). Her reading of the education system is that ‘middle-class and working-class families have differential access to various forms of cultural, social and economic capital and resources, which differentially frames the educational choices that different families can and will make’ (Archer et al, 2003).

**Discussion: Admissions**

Studies of HE participation have shown that non-traditional students with low levels of cultural capital are still less likely to attend university than traditional students with higher levels (Devas, 2011; Zimdars, 2009). Further, non-traditional students, are less likely to attend elite universities like King’s. Analysis of university applications for 2013/2014 admissions shows that ‘while we have seen some growth in applicants from less privileged neighbourhoods to higher education generally, this growth has been less noticeable in applications to highly selective... institutions’ (Independent Commission on Fees, 2013). Zimdars found a link between strong cultural knowledge and successful admission to Oxford, particularly in arts subjects while ‘reading habits were a significant predictor of admission for science subjects’ (Zimdars, Sullivan & Heath, 2009).

A study of arts and design course admissions in five institutions by Burke and McManus (2011) supports the significance of cultural capital in arts admissions. Their work on selection practices in the context of widening participation found that the value judgements of tutors perpetuated ‘processes of mis/recognition and exclusion’ in assessment of potential students. They assert that ‘fair access’ to HE based on meritocratic ideas ‘does not address differential social positions and power relations, which provide some social groups with greater access to the valuable cultural and material resources necessary to ‘play the game’ and succeed’.

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1. 30.6% of students in HE institutions are from working-class families. Anna Zimdars, “Teaching in the Context of Diversity: Introductory Quiz”.
2. 23% of undergraduates at King’s come from working-class backgrounds. Ibid.
Work by Reay et al (2005) has shown that levels of cultural capital can powerfully influence students’ choice to continue education, choice of institution, course and qualification, the application process, entrance tests and admission interviews.

Possibly the most valuable form of cultural capital possessed by students is access to information on these milestones held by educated parents and friends, an area explored by many including Archer et al (2003) and Reay et al (2005). Students whose parents have studied at university can access and exploit this valuable knowledge. Reay cites Bourdieu who sees this knowledge as ‘the embodied cultural capital of the previous generation [which] functions as a sort of advance’ (Bourdieu, 1984).

Hutchings (2003) reports that ‘having family members and friends who have experienced (or are currently in) Higher Education is a form of cultural capital that many working-class young people may lack’. Reay (2005) describes how first-generation students have access to few sources of information, limiting educational choice. They often lack funds to visit institutions, buy university guides and have limited access to online information. In contrast middle-class students’ families are more familiar with a wide range of information including prospectuses and league tables. For many middle-class students parental capital is supplemented by additional resources (information, contacts etc) provided by well-resourced or private schools.

‘Parental capital’ is also a valuable resource when students are preparing for interviews. Parents who have studied at elite universities in particular can provide information and coaching on the interview process. They may also have networks that provide a valuable source of ‘insider information’. This is significant as the expectations of interviewers can be indeterminate. Zimdars cites Karabel who reported that applicants can face ‘diffuse entrance criteria, based on “character”’ (Karabel, 1984). Her work supports Bourdieu’s finding that ‘the more vague the demands of gatekeepers in the educational system, the more important the role of cultural knowledge in meeting them’ (Bourdieu & Saint-Martin, 1974).

Some of the personal attributes seen as components of cultural capital are desirable in an interview situation. Reay et al (2005) suggest that high levels are seen in ‘the salience of confidence, certainty and sense of entitlement’, displayed by middle-class students – all qualities desirable at interview. Further, private schools are more likely to provide coaching on interview skills. Burke and McManus (2011) found that admission tutors valued characteristics in applicants traditionally associated with the ‘privileged’. The tutors’ ‘subjective construction’ of the ideal arts student was ‘historically associated with white, euro-centric forms of masculinity’.

It is worth considering the influence of school/institutional culture here. Students from elite schools arrive for interview at an elite university to find a familiar environment, in contrast to the ‘culture shock’ (Archer et al, 2003) experienced by many working-class students. This is a consideration for my teaching as classes are in the grand neo-gothic Maughan Library which some students may find intimidating.
Student experience

I now consider the continuing value of cultural capital for students at university. With significant evidence of its value in gaining a place, is it logical to surmise that these advantages are reproduced on entry? I suggest that students with lower levels of cultural capital who make it to university and (against the odds) to an elite university like King’s, continue to be disadvantaged throughout their studies. I propose that a student’s level of cultural capital will impact on their university experience beginning with their orientation, in their communications with their tutors and in their expectations of support and resources. Further it can be seen to impact academic performance and potentially play a part in retention. Crozier and Reay (2001) highlight the significance of cultural capital throughout the HE journey for ‘working-class students learning how to learn’ asserting that ‘different types and volume of capital are necessary at different stages of education’.

As in admissions, students with educated parents have access to knowledge of university life providing an advantage over first-generation attendees. This will perhaps be particularly valuable in the early days of study but will be a relevant resource throughout a university career. Crozier and Reay observe that students from elite schools frequently receive ‘on-going support from their schools or former teacher’ while at university.

The culture of the schools students originate from will have an impact on the ‘comfort level’ experienced by new students. Students coming from elite schools arriving at elite universities can be seen as ‘fish in water’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Students arriving from schools with contrasting institutional cultures may find it more challenging to master their new situations. The value of the Library Welcome inductions that I teach to help orientation is demonstrated here.

The language of academics may be one of the first challenges students encounter in their new environment. Linguistic competence is prevalent in a number of theories (eg DiMaggio, 1982) and its value can be seen in the communication between academic and student. As a new member of staff at King’s I was unfamiliar with much of the educational jargon and this must be a barrier for some students, but particularly first-generation attendees. Collier and Morgan (2008) found that this group often struggled with styles of speech, level of vocabulary and jargon. Language issues may impact on student understanding, relationships with tutors and coursework and exam success. Zimdars et al (2009) cites Bourdieu’s assertion that educators reward certain styles of language ‘a tendency to prefer eloquence to truth, style to content’.

I recently taught a class for visiting school students as part of an outreach programme. While I was merrily recommending ebook collections relevant to their study of the British Empire, one of the students shouted ‘What’s an ebook?’ – a pertinent reminder to consider the language I use.

What academics say and how they say it can be problematic for some students but equally significant are things that are unsaid – the unexpressed expectations. Crozier and Reay (2001) draw on Bernstein’s theory of ‘invisible pedagogies’ and suggest that ‘their existence demonstrates the middle-class hegemony of the structure of the HE teaching and learning processes’. Zimdars (Bourdieu, 1984 cited by Zimdars et al, 2009) notes that ‘the education
system assumes the possession of cultural capital’. Just as admissions tutors’ expectations are not always explicit (Bourdieu & Saint-Martin, 1974) so first-generation students may struggle to meet academics’ unvoiced expectations in areas of performance not related to course content, eg, structuring essays, writing style, referencing and critical thinking. I would add Library skills to these expectations, reinforcing the value of my classes on e-resources and referencing (the latter being of particular importance for certain ethnic minority cultures where replicating experts’ writing is viewed as respectful rather than plagiarising).

One unvoiced expectation is what Collier and Morgan (2008) term ‘mastery of the student role’. In their study of new first-generation students they assert that differing levels of family cultural capital correspond to ‘important differences in each group’s mastery of the student role and, thus, their ability to respond to faculty expectations’. They consider the expectation for students not just to understand, but to ‘demonstrate knowledge of course material’. The confidence of communication and relation to authorities associated with middle-class habitus (Lareau & Wieninger, 2003) will be clearly advantageous here. They conclude that successful role mastery may lead to ‘getting a better grade in a course or graduating on time’ supporting Bourdieu’s (1984) belief in a link between a family’s cultural capital and school exam success. Lareau & Weininger’s (2003) theory of cultural capital also recognises a student’s ability to ‘comply with institutionalized standards of evaluation’.

Crozier and Reay (2001) examined the pedagogic approach of two institutions and its effect on students’ ‘capital accumulation’. Drawing on Bernstein they contrasted the ‘weak framing’ (low levels of structured learning and one-to-one supervision) observed at a ‘new university’ with ‘strong framing’ (high levels of structured learning and one-to-one supervision) at an elite institution (Bernstein, 1996). They concluded that ‘weak framing’ and its associated ‘invisible pedagogies’ (Crozier & Reay, 2001) resulted in lower levels of student engagement and fewer opportunities to acquire capital.

Different levels of cultural capital can impact the expectations that students have of university and their exploitation of opportunities. Collier and Morgan (2008) found that first-generation students were less likely to take advantage of tutors’ office hours, sometimes unsure of their purpose. Reay found that ethnic minority students whose parents attended university were more likely to take advantage of extra-curricular activities (Reay et al, 2005). This is of particular relevance for my non-compulsory classes and one-to-one sessions. I have encountered students from elite universities requesting individual inductions at a time of their choosing and a library resource discovery tool they had used at Oxford and Cambridge. Might I therefore assume that conversely there are students who do not expect and are not aware of the classes I teach? Crozier and Reay (2001) observed that working class students ‘... have limited understanding of what might be at their disposal... to further their studies’.

I suggest that the student experiences outlined above could contribute to issues of retention among certain social groups. Collier and Morgan (2008) note that ‘in particular “first-generation college students” pose notable retention concerns’. Reay et al (2005) found that first-generation ethnic minority students often find themselves ‘in the wrong place or in the wrong course’. Archer at el (2003) cites Yorke et al (1997) who found that the ‘wrong choice
of subject/study area’ was one of the main factors affecting retention. Limited information available to certain social groups when choosing their courses (discussed above) is surely a contributing factor here.

Coleman’s (1988) work on social and parental capital as a positive influence on school dropout rates might be considered in a HE context here. Indeed this article prompted me to reflect on the positive effect that my Catholic school in an Irish community in Birmingham may have had on my continuing in education.

**Reflection**
In reflecting on applying knowledge of these issues in my teaching I have turned to The UK Professional Standards Framework (Higher Education Academy, 2011). ‘Acknowledging the wider context in which higher education operates recognising the implications for professional practice’ is a value which this review demonstrates. This exercise has made me revalue the classes I teach and renewed my ambition to ‘respect individual learners and diverse learning communities’. It has prompted me to commit to participate in the History department’s outreach programme in order to ‘promote participation in higher education and equality of opportunity for learners’.

I have focused on evidence of strong links between cultural capital, social background and educational success. This is partly because given my background I found these arguments to be persuasive, but also because I found little opposition to this position in the literature. In considering HE admissions and success, my interpretation is that the value of cultural capital is significant. Most researchers agree that it is an important factor contributing to the reproduction of inequalities in education. I agree with Lareau and Weininger’s (2003) conclusion that ‘the impact of the concept of cultural capital in studies of inequality is beyond dispute’.

### Top Tips for Teaching in the Context of Diversity

**Don’t make assumptions about your students’ knowledge**
- In library skills classes, ask students whether they’ve used ebooks, journals and databases before.
- It’s also important to provide reassurance and let them know that it’s fine if these resources are new to them.

**Avoid the use of jargon and explain unfamiliar terms**
- Students may not know terms such as ebook, ejournal, library catalogue, database.
- Find alternative terms and explanations eg, a journal is like a magazine.

**Provide clear instructions and make any expectations explicit**
- If you expect students to undertake some independent catalogue searches or discuss a problem with their neighbour spell this out.

**Make students aware of further support available**
- This is especially key in voluntary classes like library skills.
- Don’t rely on students seeking out information on further teaching offered.
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Reflective case study: Exploring the challenges arising from peer-labelling in the classroom

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Abstract
This case study reflects on the challenges of teaching a course on riots – incorporating a number of high-profile and sensitive issues such as immigration, crime and delinquency – to an ethnically diverse class of undergraduate students. The case study details past practice and a number of changes that I have made in terms of my approach to teaching. These changes are influenced by lessons learned from labelling theory as it applies to peer-to-peer interactions.

Introduction
As a lecturer in international security working primarily on contemporary security issues, my research and teaching focuses on a range of sensitive and polarising issues. From the intentions underpinning Iran’s nuclear programme to the use of chemical weapons in Syria to the nature and causes of riots, I have found that my classes never fail to spark considerable debate and discussion. From a teaching perspective, the provocative nature of the subjects I teach is, for the most part, a great asset as students are usually very willing to engage with the subject matter. Given the contemporary and constantly evolving nature of the subjects, students usually have the opportunity to ‘apply’ what they have learned. Barely a month goes by, for example, when riots do not break out in some corner of the globe, and I encourage students to view new developments through the critical lens that they develop and refine throughout their lectures, seminars and coursework.

This approach fits with the priorities of the UK Professional Standards Framework, which encourages educators to promote critical thinking skills and learner autonomy. Yet the highly-politicised and sensitive nature of these issues can also pose challenges in the classroom. Among other things, ‘controversy […] tends to arise when topics can be personalised by students’ (Burkstrand-Reid et al., 2011). Personalisation can occur in many ways but frequently arises when students have direct experience of some aspect of the subject in question or have a strong political or ideological investment in the topic as a result of broader processes of socialisation. Israeli and Iranian students, for example, may have fundamental and irreconcilable differences on the international approach to the Iranian nuclear challenge. Equally, Muslim and non-Muslim students may have different views on the role and place of the Islamic veil in secular societies.

These differences of opinion or belief, if properly channelled, can contribute to the construction of a productive student learning environment. Left unchecked, however, discussions on these issues have the potential to degenerate into attacks on personal beliefs,
values and attributes, thereby undermining the educational benefits of diversity in the classroom. Without proper guidance and structure, ‘students easily fall back onto talking points and fixed positions rather than remaining open to intellectual exploration of the subject at hand’ (Burkstrand et al., 2011).

Yet this constitutes just part of the challenge. A potentially more destructive (and often less visible) challenge associated with teaching controversial or politicised topics relates to the potential for stereotyping and ‘labelling’ among peers to negatively impact upon the student learning experience. Students often bring pre-conceived ideas and opinions to the classroom and these can be projected onto fellow students, with potentially harmful effects. It is this aspect of diversity in the classroom that I wish to focus on in this reflective case study.

Background to the Case Study
As mentioned above, my teaching focuses on contemporary security issues. In this context, I designed a course on the nature and causes of riots. The course first ran as a one-term course for final year undergraduate students at a different institution; this coming year I will adapt and expand the course to be a year-long module aimed at final year undergraduate students at King’s. From the outset, I took great care to design a course that would cover a range of issues relating to riots, from immigration to the psychology of crowd behaviour. I was also keen to design a course that would really engage students from multiple perspectives. To this end, lectures incorporated good amounts of discussion, external speakers and documentary videos were used to give students real-life insights into riots. Students seemed to respond well to this multi-faceted approach. Module feedback – taken both formally and informally at different points throughout the course – was positive and the quality of assessed essays was very satisfactory.

Amidst this largely positive introduction of the course, however, I encountered a unique problem. In a class of some 15 students, the composition was largely white; there were only two black students. After one class towards the middle of the module, one of the black students approached me with a request for a meeting. In this meeting, the student told me that he sometimes felt uncomfortable in class due to the fact that when we were discussing the ethnicity of those involved in riots, he felt that he was receiving unwarranted attention from his classmates. In subsequent classes, I noticed that this was indeed the case. When discussing the role of young black males in the 2011 UK riots, for example, I noticed that students frequently glanced at their black classmates, sometimes even appearing to address their comments at these students (who always sat together). This was very interesting to me as this situation appeared to reflect, at least in part, the influence of stereotypes often propagated by the media regarding those who participated in the riots, an issue I try to address during the course.

This situation pushed me to think about how students are labelled in the classroom (be it consciously or unconsciously) and what impact this has (if any) on their educational development. I was particularly keen to see what work had been done on peer-to-peer interactions. As I began my research, I quickly realised that much academic attention has been devoted to labelling theory and its application to the educational context – a number
of important studies in the late 1960s provided a basis for further exploration of the impact of labels on student development. Yet this body of literature focused largely on the relationship between teacher and student or institution and student; there was much less literature available on the concept of labelling as it applies to peer-to-peer interactions. This said, what I found provided ample food for thought.

**Insights from Labelling Theory**

Labelling theory, the origins of which are linked to social interactionism, rose to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s through the work of sociologists such as Howard Becker (1963) and Edwin Lemert (1967). Working on issues relating to deviance and crime, these theorists attempted to apply a social constructionist approach to the impact and effects of categorisation and labelling. Simply put, a label might, ‘from the perspective of the labeller, be seen as a neutral, descriptive or scientific diagnosis, but in fact it is something much more. It puts the person in a category that is loaded with social meanings and preconceptions’ (Soder, 2006). Viewed from this perspective and considering the fluid nature of identity and self-perception, labelling theory holds that the subject is changed in some way by the labelling process, both in terms of how they are viewed and how they view themselves. In the educational context, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) were among the first to apply labelling theory to the educational context with their study ‘Pygmalion in the Classroom: Teacher Expectation and Pupil’s Intellectual Development’. In this work, they applied the idea of a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ within schools, postulating that teachers’ expectations regarding the intellectual performance of their students might well impact upon the performance of those students. Somewhat paradoxically, labelling can create ‘a false definition of a student’s behaviour that then evokes a new behaviour that makes the originally false definition come true’ (Thomas, 1997). The idea being if a teacher labels a student as lazy, unwilling to engage and an under-achiever, for example, this may condition the teacher’s behaviour and, to follow the logic to its extreme, eventually end up evoking precisely that type of behaviour in the student. Significant attention has also been devoted to labelling in the context of the institution-student relationship and the academic streaming of students. Solorzano and Ornelas (2002), for example, provide detailed insights into the negative effects of academic streaming.

While much of the work applying labelling theory to the educational context explores the teacher-student or institution-student relationship, the concept can also form a lens through which peer-to-peer interactions are viewed. Indeed this is precisely the point made by Thomas in a 1997 study. Deploiring the lack of research on peer labelling, Thomas pointed out that peer labelling can have a significant impact on the educational – and, on a larger scale, social – development of students. In his paper, Thomas set out a modified version of a labelling sequence and used this to show how peer labelling can rapidly progress to peer rejection, provoking significant negative effects such as learning difficulties, underachievement, lack of motivation and social withdrawal. Of course, it is important to point out that the processes and effects of labelling comprise a spectrum of activity, ranging from unwitting and unintentional labelling and intentional labelling intended to cause discomfort or harm. The latter is widely accepted as bullying while the former is more difficult to define.
Of course labelling theory is not immune to criticism. The notion of a self-fulfilling prophecy, for example, might be viewed as a restrictive interpretative framework. It is not inevitable that a student will succumb to the negative effects of labelling. Indeed a similar perspective in the literature on riots makes the distinction between those who submit to negative social processes and those who resist through deviant behaviour (Fayard, 1987). The same approach could well apply here. It is beyond the scope of this essay to explore the nuances of labelling theory in detail, but it would be rash to dismiss the potential negative effects of peer labelling given the possibility that this process could have an important influence on the student learning environment. Crucially, in his paper Thomas pointed out that peer labelling is something that often goes unnoticed by educators, a point that resonated with my particular situation. I thus began to ask myself, should I have noticed my student’s discomfort? Should I have planned for the possibility of peer labelling in the context of class discussions on riots? Should I have expected that media representations of the riots and their participants would manifest themselves in some way in the classroom?

In this context, the work of Elizabeth Ellsworth is highly relevant. Ellsworth notes that the classroom is inevitably ‘the site of dispersed, shifting, and contradictory contexts of knowing that [coalesce] differently in different moments of student/professor speech, action, and emotion’ (Ellsworth, 1989). Clearly, both students and teachers bring different lived experiences to the classroom and these experiences can make an important contribution to the learning environment. Yet the ‘knowing’ or interpretative framework that is produced by these experiences is often permeated with assumptions (based on age, class, gender, ethnicity, etc.). These assumptions may be projected onto others, often inadvertently, thus contributing to a process whereby pre-existing, negative social power relations are strengthened rather than challenged. My situation did not involve overt peer labelling but the actions of other students, likely unintentional, had been interpreted as a subtle form of stereotyping by the student who came to see me. At the very least, I felt that I should explore ways to mitigate this situation reoccurring. To do this, I turned my attention to the literature on the educational benefits of diversity in the classroom and considered how I might use this to my advantage.

**Benefiting from diversity**

In the academic literature on teaching to diversity, difference in the classroom is widely accepted as an educational asset. Mitchell Chang, for example, draws on empirical data to support his claim that racial diversity has ‘a small but significant positive effect on students’ experience of college’ (Chang, 2001). A similar study by Terenzini et al. (2001) showed that racial and ethnic diversity in the classroom helped promote student learning. Furthermore, there is also agreement that diverse cultural backgrounds can greatly enhance the broader student learning environment; the educational benefits of diversity are not limited to minority groups (Sleeter & Grant, 2009). A recent report by the US-based National Coalition on School Diversity showed how diversity in the classroom facilitated ‘the promotion of critical thinking and problem-solving skills and higher academic achievement’ (Siegel-Hawley, 2012). Crucially, the report argued that these benefits extend to all students, whether they be part of minority or majority groups. The above-mentioned pieces are just a small sample of a large and growing body of literature. Clearly then, there is much to be said for diversity of the classroom. The question I faced, however, was how to harness this literature and use it to
address my classroom situation. To do this, I decided to re-evaluate my approach to teaching the class on riots.

**Promoting the benefits of diversity in the classroom**
Upon reflection, I realised that while I placed emphasis on the importance challenging the stereotypes that are associated with different cultures, backgrounds and perspectives in my course on riots, I was perhaps doing this in a rather abstract and detached manner. With classes inevitably made up of a range of ethnicities and backgrounds, surely I could link the objectives of the course to a broader lesson on the benefits of diversity that would pre-empt the type of situation my student had complained about?

To this end, I have decided to incorporate a discussion on ethnic and cultural diversity into my opening class. My goal here will be to confront issues relating to stereotyping and associated labelling head-on through the use of images relating to the riots. My approach here stems from the notion of threshold concepts. Threshold concepts ‘are those key ideas, concepts or processes in a discipline that need to be understood by students before they can understand other parts of the subject that follow from them’ (Fry et al., 2003). Proposed by Meyer and Land in 2003, the concept has proved enormously popular as a teaching strategy. My intention is to show students a number of images of rioters that were prominent in the media during and after the 2011 riots and ask them to respond to those images. Significantly, all of these images portray young black males, despite the fact that rioters were fairly evenly distributed across ethnic groups. The goal will be to elicit a range of views and opinions that can then be discussed. I will use these images as a gateway to discussing the issues and challenges associated with labelling and stereotyping. My hope is that this approach will equip students to better understand the processes at play in this context, and provide them with an analytical frame of reference that can be applied to the subject matter. On a larger scale, I hope to broaden the worldview of the students and give them an understanding of the wider benefits of diversity, both in the classroom and beyond.

### Top Tips for Teaching in the Context of Diversity

1. **Challenge assumptions from the outset**
   It is important to bear in mind that both students and teacher bring certain assumptions to the classroom. These are rooted in individual experiences of socialisation and differ from person to person. It is important to consider how these assumptions may influence your teaching and the interactions between all stakeholders (teacher/student, student/student). The experience of my class on riots taught me to challenge assumptions regarding the relationship between ethnic origins and collective violence/criminality in a direct manner from the outset of the class.

2. **Beware of labelling**
   Labelling can be a conscious or unconscious act with the potential to undermine your efforts to promote student learning. Spend time thinking about how you view your students. Does a student’s age, gender, ethnic origins influence how you view the student? What about their manner of presentation or even their accent? Does your view affect your treatment of these students? It is
important to be aware of the myriad factors that can influence the process of labelling. It is even more important to consider how labelling impacts upon the teacher/student relationship.

3. Use diversity to your advantage
A diverse group of students can contribute to the construction of an extremely productive learning environment. Managed in a positive and constructive manner, different views and perspectives can open up discussion, challenge conventional views and bring fresh insights to a debate. In my experience, spending a little time thinking about how to capitalize on the diversity in your classroom can bring significant rewards in the form of a dynamic and participative classroom that captures the interest of students.

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Reflective case study: Something lacking: Teaching in classrooms with minimal diversity

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Introduction
I had ambitious plans for my module in the autumn of 2009. I was in the School of Geography and Development at the University of Arizona, and though I was still a PhD student, I had already taught several modules as the sole instructor at the university level. The module I had developed was titled World Regional Geography: Brasil, and it was a capstone module for senior-level undergraduates. Pulling from my own research and intending to draw upon numerous themes in cultural geography, my hope was to highlight several geographic concepts (eg, political geography, radical geography, feminist geography) and to ground those topics within the context of Brazil. The syllabus called for lectures and in-class discussions on issues of slavery and domestic violence, religion and environmental degradation, and socio-cultural constructions of race and gender. I was hopeful that students would challenge me and engage with one another, and I was counting on a diversity of experiences and perspectives to facilitate a dynamic classroom atmosphere. Walking into class on the first day of the semester, I was filled with optimism and anxiety. I had big goals for this module. And then, as I looked around, I realized that every single student was white and not one of them was female. Immediately I began to worry over my teaching strategies, and more crucially, I feared that the module’s learning outcomes might be in danger.

Lest I appear melodramatic, diversity in the classroom is a topic regularly considered by academic researchers (eg, Dilg, 1999; Darder et al., 2008; Vargas, 2002). Studies range broadly, from the different ways that diversity manifests in the classroom (Gutierrez, 1995), to innovative ways to approach diversity in teaching (Adams et al., 2007), to the important roles that student diversity serves in collaborative learning exercises (Terenzini et al., 2001). Quite bluntly, the concern I felt for the success of my module was certainly not unfounded: homogeneous classrooms can be stunted in host of different ways (Gurin et al., 2002). Students may be quite sharp and well prepared, but without alternative and (sometimes) conflicting viewpoints from their peers, they lack complex critical engagements that prepare them for an increasingly interconnected world. Nevertheless, what concerned me most of all on that first day of class was how my own teaching practices might be made ineffective. What role, I began to wonder, does diversity serve in pedagogical techniques, and how can teachers cultivate diverse perspectives without a heterogeneous group of students? Further to this point, what is diversity in the classroom, how is it constructed/imagined by teachers and students, and what might be the value in critically interrogating it? These are questions I seek to explore in this essay, and by drawing from my own experience in the classroom and comparing those lessons alongside a focused collection of scholarly resources, my intent is to offer new insight into the ways diversity can be addressed in the classroom.
I begin with a brief overview of scholarly works that pertain directly to this topic. By drawing from sources that address diversity in the classroom and pedagogies attuned to multi-perspective understandings, my goal is to situate my own experience within a relevant collection of case studies and research. I next move on to consider my module in the autumn of 2009. Reflecting upon the literature cited in this essay, I attempt to tease out several diversity-related issues that I confronted while teaching this module, and to consider, in hindsight, some valuable lessons learned. My purpose is not necessarily to offer any definitive conclusions, but rather to highlight the roles that diversity plays in teaching and learning engagements.

**Diversity in higher education**

According to Terenzini et al. (2001), highly diverse student groups are likely to draw more from collaborative learning projects and problem solving exercises than are less-diverse ones. While the authors acknowledge that the learning outcomes of diverse student cohorts are rarely predictable, group work is often more productive between students who have significantly different backgrounds (e.g., ethnicity, age, nationality). Echoing these conclusions are the works of Dilg (1999) and Gurin et al. (2002), with both studies noting how diverse student populations facilitate stronger, more critical student engagements. In fact, write Gurin et al. (2002), the advantages of diversity in the classroom are such that positive discrimination efforts are regularly justified, as the benefits they provide accrue to all students in myriad ways.

The appearance of diversity in the classroom, however, is something that is not necessarily obvious or straightforward. Often conflated with ‘minority’ groups (e.g., non-white, non-male, physically disabled), diversity, reminds Tisdell (2007), is not always clearly visible. Students (and teachers) can harbor numerous diverse characteristics that are not outwardly distinguishable, and remaining sensitive to these diversities is something students (and faculty) must constantly strive to maintain (see also Gutierrez, 1995; Sheets, 2009; Vargas, 2002). Argues Kobayashi (1999), so long as teachers and students continue to make assumptions about one another based upon outward appearances, injustices and misunderstandings will consistently permeate the classroom atmosphere.

As such, ways to address diversity in teaching and learning have come under increased scrutiny in recent years (Adams et al., 2007; Darder et al., 2008). According to Mildred and Zuniga (2004), the effects of this trend, however, are not always positive: despite greater diversity in many educational environments, students can frequently be resistant to diverse perspectives and alternative pedagogies. The authors explore how this problem can be addressed (see also Alderman et al., 2013), suggesting that to understand and overcome this resistance, teachers need to consider broader socio-educational contexts and allow students to reflect critically upon their own experiences. Agrees Gay (2002), though it may require extra time and imaginative preparation strategies from teachers, topics related to diversity can be addressed in nearly every classroom regardless of student makeup.

**Diverse topics in homogeneous space: teaching World Regional Geography**

Looking out at a classroom of all-white, all-male faces on the first day of my World Regional Geography module, something immediately came to my attention: class discussions regarding diversity were in danger of appearing ‘other worldly,’ as something outside of and disconnected to our immediate context. One of my primary teaching objectives has always been to illustrate
the connections between social processes in multiple places, but without ‘local’ reminders of heterogeneity, I worried that students might begin to conceptualize diversity as something existent elsewhere (eg, in Brazil), and not something that they too negotiate on a daily basis. Moreover, I feared, students might not take seriously discussions of diversity since they had no immediate (and obvious) reminders of difference in the classroom. And finally, for reasons I still have trouble articulating, I was concerned with how effectively I could lead discussions and lectures on topics related to diversity. For example – and perhaps for no good reason whatsoever – I imagined that an all-male classroom would pay little attention to my lectures on feminist geographical critiques and the ways socially constructed notions of gender are geographically situated. More directly, I wondered if they might not take me seriously, thinking I was simply paying ‘lip service’ to such issues for curriculum requirements.

As I came to discover, however, students were considerate and deferential in their engagements with diverse topics. To be fair, very few took much interest in feminist geographies or changing gender dynamics in contemporary Brazil (eg, no one chose to focus on these issues in their term papers), but students completed their weekly readings and participated during in-class discussions. Questions of race and masculinity drew more critical interest, and perhaps the many similarities (and differences) between Brazil and the United States made such topics more appealing to students. While I felt the class sometimes lacked critical and contrasting viewpoints during lectures and discussions, students were willing to consider alternate points of view (often put forward by me) and to question some of their pre-given assumptions. Yet to my great disappointment, what I found most limiting in the classroom was my own treatment of the very topics that concerned me so much. Perhaps because of my own (unfounded) fears that students would not take seriously my treatment of diversity issues, I approached such topics with greater-than-necessary caution and failed to push students by reiterating certain examples in order to exemplify a given point. My worries over failing to unpack thoroughly specific questions related to diversity came to be a self-fulfilling prophecy, and ultimately, I felt, the class suffered more from my teaching approach than from anything else.

Reasons for this are complex and perhaps psychoanalytic in nature, and it is beyond the scope of this essay to explore deeply my own personal limitations and psychological baggage. Suffice to say, what I found when addressing topics related to gender diversity and unequal socio-economic conditions was that the classroom lacked a sense of urgency and tension that can sometimes characterize heterogeneous educational environments. It may have been that students were unafraid to appear insulting, and thus they failed to push themselves to better understand topics that, while not especially important to them, may have been important to their peers. This was certainly something from which I as the teacher suffered, believing (quite likely erroneously) that students could not connect to or take serious interest in discussions with which they had little direct experience. As a tutor, I believe I had come to rely upon (perceived) student interest in certain topics, presuming, for example – and again, quite likely erroneously – that female students might take a keener interest in feminist geographical approaches than would male students. This imagined interest helped to fuel my pursuit of such topics in the past, and faced with a heterogeneous student cohort, I had put forth a better teaching effort. But when faced – again for example – with a gender-homogenous classroom, my perceptions of student interest and capabilities shifted, leading to my neglect of certain topics for fear of student disinterest.
Remembering, as Tisdell (2007) points out, that many diversities are unseen, I should not have been so uncritical in my presumptions of student interest and capability. Moreover, as I know full well from geography, diversity is not something that is ever fixed, but rather it is constantly in flux and highly spatially contingent. This perhaps helps to shed light upon my awkwardness with diversity in a ‘non-diverse’ environment, as I began to conceptualize ‘difference’ as something outside of the classroom and foreign to our immediate context. I had begun to stereotype what diversity might look like (eg, Gutierrez, 1995), and in so doing I was committing the same errors I hoped to warn my students against. By imagining diversity as something merely visible and embodied by some students more so than others, I failed to reflect critically on what the idea of ‘diversity’ means in the first place. If one decides that diversity signifies a certain set of phenotypic characteristics (eg, sex), then one is unlikely to recognize diversity in its other forms (eg, gender). Additionally, one does not have to be directly connected to a given topic in order to critically examine it (eg, Adams et al., 2007; Darder et al., 2008), and by harnessing ‘an empathetic pedagogy’ (Alderman et al., 2013, p. 180), teachers can help students connect to subject matters that might initially appear foreign or anachronistic. Even if diversity is not outwardly visible, it can be introduced in the classroom through a host of dynamic and productive teaching methods.

In order to guard against such problems in the future, I now feel that it is me – and not the ethnic, gender, or physical makeup of the student body – that needs to adapt. Drawing again from Mildred and Zuniga (2004), even in cases where students might be resistant to discussions of diversity, tutors can harness in-class discussions and student experience to highlight the value of heterogeneous insights. More importantly, teachers can engage with students to illustrate diversity in practice, revealing to all class participants (teachers included) the diversity that exists below surface-level perceptions (Sheets, 2009). Obvious markers of diversity in the classroom may indeed help to facilitate this process, but in a sense, they can also work to limit student understandings. For example, so long as diversity is recognized according to simple physical indicators, students (and teachers) can become blind to non-visible manifestations of diversity and difference. But when class participants are forced to think critically about what diversity may actually mean, and how it can shift geographically, the topic becomes much more complex and increasingly immanent. ‘Diversity,’ as such, thus becomes something much broader and more relevant, and students are more likely to reflect on topics of discussion outside of the classroom. As I learned the hard way in my own module, it is the tutor’s responsibility much more than it is the students’ to enable this process, creating space for discussions of diversity to emerge even in classrooms that initially appear inimical to it.

**Conclusions**

While student diversity in the classroom can no doubt help to create more robust and dynamic student interactions (Dilg, 1999; Gurin et al., 2002; Terenzini et al., 2001), it should by no means be required to effectively address ‘diverse’ and nuanced topics of social behavior. As I learned firsthand in 2009, engagements with diversity in my module suffered more from my own teaching ineffectiveness (and personal glitches) than they did from the outwardly homogeneous makeup of the students themselves. The problems I associated with the module related primarily to my own practice, and much less often reflected the students’ interactions with one another. By working to address diversity as an un-fixed, non-predictable category
– and also to seek out innovative and experienced-based pedagogies with which to examine it – I hope to ensure that my future modules do not experience the same failings that I endured during World Regional Geography. Diversity, as I learned, should not be counted on to be predictable, and as educators work to acknowledge and account for this tendency, new and critically innovative perspectives are likely to emerge from a host of different classroom environments.

Still to be investigated, however, are changing perceptions that students bring to the classroom with respect to diversity. Much has been made in the literature of tutor and administrative understandings of diversity, yet there loom important questions to be addressed related to the ways that students themselves confront the concept. Are positive discrimination efforts altering the ways students identify (and also see one another), and related to this, are students, perhaps, as the world becomes more globalized, conceptualizing diversity along new lines? If so, how does this alter their educational experience, and how are educators to address and engage with these issues in the classroom? These are just some of several topics still to be explored, and as universities continue to expand and reach broadly to connect with students and countries elsewhere, they will only grow in importance and critical urgency. One thing that educators can likely count on, however, is that student cohorts in future years are likely to be increasingly unpredictable in terms of their ‘diversity’ indicators: like in my own module, one semester may see a gendered and racially homogeneous group, whereas the next semester is likely to be entirely different. Accounting for this tendency should push teachers to be more innovative in their approaches to diversity, and by remaining un-fixed and critically engaged with topics of identity, educators are less likely to make some of the same mistakes that I did during 2009.

**Top Tips for Teaching in the Context of Diversity**

1. Be critical of what diversity means, and challenge students to think about the effects of ‘diversity’ as a discourse and idea.

2. Be critical and open about your own experience/s, and use these examples to facilitate dialog with students.

3. Take care with expectations and perceptions about diversity. For example, there is no reason why women should necessarily be more interested in feminist perspectives, or why non-white students should be more interested in critical race theory. Be careful of stereotyping your students, and address this openly in the classroom with your students. It will help them to be more critical as well.

4. No matter how more or less ‘diverse’ the class may be, mix students frequently with others so that they are not always engaging with the same group of peers.

5. Draw on examples from outside the classroom, and in particular, discuss recent or current events. This can help to facilitate “an empathetic pedagogy” (Alderman et al., 2013, p. 180) by challenging students to reflect on issues of social justice and privilege.
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Review: Student carers in higher education

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Introduction
Universities have a responsibility to address access issues for students who might experience barriers to education at this level, including students affected by disability, physical and mental health issues. Although universities are visibly taking steps to support disabled students only two UK universities have developed policies to support students who care for a friend, partner or relative. In this paper I hope to identify the reasons for the marginalisation of student carers, through an examination of their experiences of university life within the context of wider conceptions of ‘caring’ work.

As background to this topic, I present a brief overview of what is known about carers in the UK, their numbers, social identities and the extent of their caring activities. I also examine recent legislation relevant to carers and the responsibilities of government agencies and other bodies towards carers.

I go on to review existing research on student carers and identify the main themes relating to their experiences of higher education and managing caring responsibilities. I seek to make sense of these findings through a consideration of wider social understandings of carers’ roles and their place in higher education policy discourse, and finally reflect on the implications for higher education teaching practice.

Carers: Facts and figures
A carer is defined in research and policy as ‘someone who looks after a friend, relative or neighbour, who needs support because of their sickness, age or disability’ (Aylward, 2009). It is estimated that there are around 6.5 million carers in the UK, with this number calculated to grow by around 60 per cent over the next 30 years in line with longer life expectancy and the increased emphasis on home and community based health and social care (Carers UK, 2013). Caring responsibilities affect the 50–64 age group most, though there is a substantial number of around 300 000 ‘young adult carers aged between 16 and 24. Caring is more likely to be undertaken by women (58 per cent of carers are female) than men (Carers UK 2012). A recent Department of Health funded survey (Health and Social Care Information Centre, 2010) found that carers are most commonly supporting someone with a physical disability (58 per cent of carers), chronic illness (37 per cent) or a sensory impairment (20 per cent).

The category of ‘informal’ or ‘unpaid’ carers was established in the policy and research landscape only relatively recently, from the 1970s and 1980s, partly as the result of activism on the part of groups of relatives of people with disabilities or health conditions (Heaton, 1999). Fine and Glendinning (2005) make a link between this activism, and feminist
scholarship that exposed and critiqued the unpaid work carried out by women in the domestic sphere; work that was found to have a disproportionately negative impact on women’s life chances. Caring was reframed as an issue of social justice.

However, it was not until 1996 that carers were made the exclusive focus of policy following the implementation of the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995 (Department of Health, 1995). Most recently the Carers Equal Opportunities Act 2004 has clarified the responsibilities of local authorities towards carers, including the requirement to offer them a carer’s assessment in their own right, and to take account of carers’ own health and social needs and their aspirations regarding their activities in the fields of paid work, education and training. Financial support for carers is organised through the Carers Allowance. Entitlement for this is dependent on carers spending at least 35 hours a week caring for someone who receives Disability Living Allowance middle or higher rate or Attendance Allowance. Notably, students in full time education are not eligible for Carers Allowance, notwithstanding the amount of time they might be spending in caring activities. The Equality Act of 2010 extended the legal protection from discrimination to carers because of their ‘association’ with groups protected by law because of age, illness or disability (Government Equalities Office, 2010). However, the law does not extend to requirement for service providers to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ for carers as it does for disabled people themselves (Unison, nd).

This recent legislation reflects the double-edged policy response to informal carers. On the one hand they are seen as ‘providers’ or care who are estimated to contribute services and support worth around £119 billion to the care economy (Carers UK, 2013) and who are increasingly positioned as expert partners with professionals as part of the ‘triad of care’ (Sadler & McKevitt, 2013). On the other hand there is a recognition that carers themselves should be seen as care ‘users’ who have their own needs which should be addressed even when these clash with the needs of the people they care for (Heaton, 1999).

A great deal of the research on carers has focused on the ‘burden’ and disadvantage accruing to carers. The HISC survey found that 42 per cent of carers reported that caring activities had impacted on their social life, personal relationships or leisure time (Health and Social Care Information Centre, 2010). Moreover, caring can have a negative effect on self-rated health, in proportion to the number of hours of care provided (Office for National Statistics, 2011). The impact of caring on general health appears to be greatest on young people under 25, who also report negative emotional consequences of caring such as anger, tiredness, loneliness, and isolation (Aylward, 2009).

Research on student carers
Reliable information on the impact of caring on student experiences in higher education is limited. The task of drawing conclusions from the research is complicated by the fact that different studies use different definitions of caring, for instance including parents of under 16s (Alsop et al., 2008) or excluding carers of disabled children (NUS, 2013). Most identify the difficulty of establishing an accurate estimate of the number of student carers. This is because many will not self-identify as carers choosing not to disclose this aspect of their lives (NUS, 2013; Hussain et al., 2011). Being a carer can be viewed as a stigmatizing identity (Berti, 2013)
especially when ‘the cared for’ has problems of mental health or addiction. Moreover, many students may simply not identify with the label ‘carer’; they may view their caring activities as taken for granted and therefore unremarkable aspects of their close family relationships (Adamson & Donovan, 2005). The NUS Pound in Your Pocket survey of 14,404 students found just under 3 per cent reported they had caring responsibilities for an adult and most of these would be providing care for parents or parents-in-law (NUS, 2013). Little is known about the age distribution of student carers, though there is evidence that mature students (over 21 at the start of their studies) are most likely to have caring responsibilities (Alsop et al., 2008).

The experiences of student carers
Despite methodological problems, studies reflecting the experiences of student carers do suggest some common themes relating to choice of courses, managing disclosure, barriers to learning, and experiences of good practice. Students’ caring responsibilities appear to influence choice of university and course. University location is an important factor for students mindful of the importance of their own local support networks in facilitating their caring activities (NUS, 2013; Hussain et al., 2011). In general, mature students are most likely to choose courses in social care or subjects allied to medicine (HESA 2013). Participants in the NUS survey reported that they had chosen these subject areas either to become better carers, or because of the potential to combine academic qualifications with their personal caring experiences to their advantage in applying for jobs (NUS, 2013). A further key consideration was that many of such courses are subsidised and students do not incur fees. Healthcare courses however, can impose particular stresses on student carers when they have to complete often lengthy practical placements, subject to local employment conditions and shift rotas and separated from their peer group and peer support (Kirton et al., 2012).

Students appear quite wary of disclosing their role as carers and usually wait until an issue has come up in their studies relating to caring for which they need some additional support (NUS, 2013). One participant in a study of radiography and radiotherapy student carers stated:

‘I don’t want to start asking for special arrangements. They might think I can’t cope and not give me a job later on.’
Hussain et al., 2011: 52

Kirton et al (2012) identified a theme of ‘hidden lives’ among the accounts of their student carers who did not share details of their lives of carers with others in the university. Their participants also expressed concerns that others might blame the cared for person for impeding the student’s progress (Kirton et al., 2012).

Not surprisingly student carers describe feeling isolated and cut off from the main student body, though do derive emotional and social support from their contacts with other carers who are likely to share an understanding of the complexity of their lives (Kirton et al., 2012; Hussain et al., 2011). Student carers are more likely to be struggling financially than other students (González-Arnal & Kilkey, 2009) even though many cope not only with studying and caring, but also with holding down paid employment (Maher et al., 2009), most commonly to cover basic household costs, rather than to earn some extra money to spend on themselves (National
A common concern of student carers is ‘time poverty’; not having sufficient time to manage their university and home commitments. They worry about the impact that this may have on their attainment. There is some evidence that such worries are justified as one study found that the attainment of student carers on an occupational therapy course was significantly lower than non-carers (Hussain et al., 2013). The same study found that twice as many of the student carers in their sample (30 per cent) did not complete their course of study, compared to non-carers. Juggling academic and home commitments can be particularly complex for student carers because of the lack of predictability in caring demands, which can be beset by ‘crisis points’ when the cared-for person’s physical or mental health takes an unexpected turn for the worse (NUS, 2013). Students carers report the psychological stress and emotional pressure of feelings of guilt and role conflict when they feel either that they are neglecting their caring responsibilities, or failing to make the most of the opportunities of academic life (Alsop et al., 2008; Hussain et al., 2011, 2013).

Despite all these difficulties, there is evidence that student carers, in common with many carers in general (Hunt, 2003; Wong et al., 2009), derive positive benefits from their caring roles and from combining caring and studying. Achieving academically can feel like a kind of ‘giving back’ to cared for family members who have provided support themselves in the past (González-Arnal & Kilkey, 2009). Commitment to studying brings additional pressures, but also constitutes a physical and mental break from caring which student carers appreciate (NUS, 2013).

**Implications for universities**

These findings have clear implications for universities. UK universities have to demonstrate their commitment to the ‘Widening Participation’ (WP) strategy initiated by New Labour. As a typical ‘Third Way’ initiative the original aims of this strategy aligned with principles of social justice in promoting opportunities for socially disadvantaged citizens to take advantage of higher education, whilst also advancing the goals of advancing the UK’s position in the global ‘knowledge economy’ by ensuring the full exploitation of all aspects of human capital from all strata of society. This position is summarised on the HEFCE website:

‘Widening access and improving participation in higher education are a crucial part of our mission.’

‘Our aim is to promote and provide the opportunity of successful participation in higher education to everyone who can benefit from it. This is vital for social justice and economic competitiveness.’

Addressing the needs and concerns of student carers fits in with this agenda. From a more pragmatic perspective, it is inevitable that there will be carers within the student body whether declared or not. The risks of underachievement and non-completion faced by these students will affect a university’s rankings and competitiveness.

The research on student carers points to the major positive impact that institutional support can have for this group, particularly when it is based around creative and compassionate reflection on the needs of individual students (NUS, 2013). However, such individualised, grass-
roots level instances of good practice run the risk of lacking consistency, sustainability and coherence (Alsop et al., 2008). The literature also proposes a raft of recommendations that are directed at achieving more structural and systemic changes (see Box 1).

Box 1: Recommendations from research and strategy documents (Learning and Skills Council, 2009; Hussain et al., 2011, 2013; NUS, 2013)

- Routine collection of data by each Higher Education Institution (HEI) about students’ caring responsibilities
- Improved resources for advice and guidance (benefits, grants, educational pathways)
- Extension of Carer’s Allowance to full-time students
- Support for participation in student life
- Programme structure designed with carers’ needs in mind
- Agreed number of ‘carer leave days’
- Inclusion of student carers in HEI equality and diversity policies
- HEI self-assessment and audit
- Staff training
- Joined-up working with carer’s organisations
- Courses and pathways tailored specifically for student carers allowing for flexible attendance, remote participation
- Special needs childcare

Discussion and conclusions
Although the recent NUS survey and report suggest that the needs of student carers are making their way onto the HEI policy agenda, progress is slow. Although a number of universities do have references to student carers (often together with student parents) on their student welfare webpages, only two UK universities, Glasgow and Leeds, have developed specific policy documents directed at student carers.

The reasons for the marginalisation of student carers within HEI policy discourse are informed by the wider context of politics and broader social understandings. Since the disbanding of the national Aimhigher programme in July 2011 which was sponsored by HEFCE and administered through local partnerships each HEI is now responsible for its own WP strategy. The increased marketization of higher education and the ongoing shift from publicly subsidized to individually funded university places presents challenges to social justice aspirations of WP (Dillon, 2007). There does not appear to be one universally accepted list of WP groups and to some extent universities have greater leeway to delimit the range of their ‘inclusiveness’ (Butcher et al., 2012; Bowl and Hughes, 2013). Including student carers as a WP group depends at least in part on the discretion of the individual HEI.

Making sure that student carers’ concerns are reflected in HEI policy is further challenged by the conceptual complexities associated with the term ‘carer’ (Molyneaux et al., 2011). It remains a contested term, and some commentators have criticised the dichotomous evolution of the ‘carer’ and ‘cared for’ in health and social policy as autonomous unitary
subjects involved in a one-way relationship of mainly instrumental support and practical activities of caring (Fine & Glendinning, 2005). Commentators taking a more critical approach are likely to view caring practices as characterised by reciprocity and interdependence and embedded within social networks, bound up with practices and meanings which reference and construct dimensions of social difference, including gender, age, and ethnicity (Chattoo & Ahmad, 2008; Sadler & McKevitt, 2013).

For teachers in higher education a key learning point in the light of the arguments presented above is to appreciate that caring as a widespread and crucially important social practice will never map directly onto the bureaucratic and administrative definitions of ‘carers’. Supporting a student with issues around caring is not just a question of practical support; it involves being invited as a privileged bystander into a relationship with a relationship, and requires an understanding of the social and cultural context of that relationship. Student carers also represent a valuable resource, especially within health and social care departments in universities where the ‘carer’s perspective’ is increasingly valued (Manthorpe, 2013). This necessitates a two-pronged pedagogical approach. On the one hand teachers need to offer support to student carers to help them negotiate the challenges of combining caring responsibilities and academic work. On the other hand, teachers should also appreciate the creativity and resilience of student carers (Maher et al., 2009) and their rich funds of experiential knowledge which has the potential to enhance the learning of other students as well as teachers (see Top Tips).

### Student Carers: Top Tips for University Teachers

- Information relevant to student carers should be included in induction and orientation materials for new students.
- Themes of care and caring crop up in curricula in the humanities, social sciences and health sciences. Teachers need to reflect on how to present materials in ways that are respectful and inclusive with respect to the experiences of student carers.
- Teachers need to be aware of the culturally patterned nature of caring. Their own presumptions about what amount and what kind of caring is “normal” and appropriate may not mirror the particular social and cultural contexts of student carers they are teaching.
- Student carers may be invited to contribute to the learning of other students where relevant. They might be happy to be consulted on the development of learning materials, or to give a presentation regarding their own experiences of caring. Student carers will need support in these tasks, which they may prefer to undertake anonymously. Their work should be recompensed, either as academic credits or financially.
- Use of elearning platforms can benefit student carers (as well as many other students facing additional challenges). Audio or video recordings of lectures, seminars and powerpoint presentations can be posted online and accessed by student carers who may be struggling to attend in person at times when caring responsibilities are more pressing.
• Student carers may need support to negotiate university regulations regarding mitigating circumstances requiring extensions to deadlines for submission of assignments or re-evaluation of exam submissions.
• Teachers should know where to signpost student carers in need of additional financial, practical or psychological support.

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Reflective case study: 
Adopting inclusive strategies to reach students with non-disclosed disabilities

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This case study concentrates on the delivery of a series of teaching sessions for undergraduate dental students, a reflection on my past practice and the recent changes I made as I began to review the materials and the classroom content for upcoming training sessions.

The UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education sets out the necessary elements for effective teaching practice. In particular, the framework requires appropriate methods for teaching, and the promotion of equality for learners (Higher Education Academy, 2011). During the process of reviewing my practice, I started to consider whether my teaching did effectively promote equality for learners and used appropriate methods to reach all students, or whether I was using a ‘one size fits all’ approach. In particular I was concerned about the best way to reach students with an undisclosed disability which could potentially impact on effective learning. In this case study, I consider the reasons for non-disclosure, and outline the path to improving my practice to achieve equal learning opportunities for all students irrespective of personal characteristics.

The literature in this subject area discusses the social model of disability versus the medical model, that is instead of defining an individual by their illness for which they are wholly and solely responsible, one defines disability as social oppression which can be eradicated by adapting services to make them inclusive and removing the barriers to effective participation (Borland and James, 1999; Goode, 2007). To achieve the removal of these barriers, I needed to aim for a teaching practice which was inclusive at the point of delivery rather than reactive at the point of need, and which would enable students to select from a range of learning tools without needing to disclose and request specifically adjusted material.

A consideration of current practice

As an information specialist at King’s College London, I deliver teaching to undergraduates and postgraduate students across the health schools. Every May I run a series of teaching for first year dental students in preparation for a poster project. The sessions comprise training on how to search health databases and how to manage references. I see the students one more time the following September for an optional refresher course as their project deadlines draw near. After that, they are free to come and see me on an individual basis for further training and advice, but I won’t have any more formal contact with them for the rest of their time at the College. This lack of contact time is one of the major barriers I had to consider when I began updating the course content and materials. As a library professional, I do not have
the opportunity to build working relationships with the majority of students, and this makes it difficult to assess a class performance in the context of their achievements during the rest of the academic year. Over the years that I’ve taught this session I’ve encountered students who find the class content difficult to follow, or those who are disruptive or appear uncooperative, and I’ve dealt with these occurrences as diplomatically as possible, but I’ve never considered the reasons behind a lack of comprehension or disruptive behaviour, or reviewed my practices and training materials to ensure that they reach a diverse student cohort with different learning styles and needs. Moreover, by not doing so, I am not properly fulfilling the requirement of the UK Professional Standards Framework to ‘promote participation in higher education and equality of opportunity for learners’ (Higher Education Academy, 2011).

Information Specialists have contact with the College disability services who notify us when a student has disclosed a disability. In addition to College-agreed extended loan limits, and access to specialist equipment kept at the library enquiry desk, we will also contact the student and consult with them about how best to support them. This agreed level of support will be built into any library training sessions that the student attends, and fed back to colleagues in the library Customer Services team. However, when a disability is undisclosed, it’s all too easy to take a person at face value and make assumptions about certain behaviours (Clair et al., 2005; Stone, 2005). As Nancy Black notes in her study on library outreach for learning disabled distance students, although non-disclosure means that the individual won’t be perceived to be less able, ‘we may on the other hand, make different assumptions, such as presuming a person is “lazy” and unmotivated, when various difficulties become evident’ (Black, 2004). With that in mind, I felt it important to expand my teaching methods to take account of different learning styles, and increase my awareness of specific learning difficulties which might occur as the result of student disability.

**Invisible disabilities and the reason for non-disclosure**

The non-disclosing disabled student does not necessarily fit what Stone (2005) calls our ‘culturally accepted markers for disability’, ie a physical indicator such as a wheelchair or a guide dog. When we encounter students with an obvious physical disability, we can make adjustments to our teaching delivery to make sure they don’t miss out on crucial learning. However invisible disabilities such as diabetes or epilepsy, mental health, learning or behavioural disorders are far harder to identify, because without these accepted markers, we automatically assume an identity of wellness and well-being on the part of the student who may then assume this ‘virtual identity’ assigned to them in order to ‘pass’ as non-disabled – Goffman cited in DeJordy (2008).

There is a large amount of literature which examines the reasons behind non-disclosure of a disability. These range from prior negative experiences with disclosure, fear of being singled out or stigmatised, reluctance to be treated as a ‘disabled person’, rather than simply a ‘person’ or concern that they might be perceived as making excuses for poor work (Davis, 2005; Livneh et al., 2001; Martin, 2010; Stone, 2005; Applin, 1999). The American philosopher G.H. Mead posited the idea of the socialised conception of self, that is taking on the attitudes of the group – the ‘generalised other’ (Roberts, 1977) and this idea has also been examined in terms of self-identity and non-disclosure in group settings – that the individual perceives themselves to be weaker, abnormal, ‘other’ from the accepted social group and therefore
chooses to remain silent, to ‘pass’ in order to fit in (DeJordy, 2008). Others may not perceive themselves to be disabled and reject this label for themselves.

Despite work in this area to reduce the stigma of disability and promote equality through the Equalities Act and disability outreach in higher education institutions, students continue to have mixed experiences when disclosing. In two studies, students talked about the lack of communication between departments – for example a disclosure of disability to the admission department may not be passed onto the relevant School leaving the burden of continuing disclosure squarely on the shoulders of the student (Borland and James, 1999; Quinn et al., 2009). It was also reported in one study that staff tended to be less sympathetic when a disability was disclosed after the academic year had started as it seemed like an excuse for poor work (Goode, 2007).

A way forward

Negative attitudes are unfortunately still in evidence, due to a lack of understanding of disabilities, in particular mental health disorders (Quinn et al., 2009; Stein, 2012), and this can have a detrimental effect on the willingness on the part of the student to disclose a disability, or to seek additional help. As I began to re-organise my course, I started to think about ways to create a relaxed teaching environment and to foster trust between myself and the class so that participants would feel more comfortable contributing and completing the learning tasks, and also asking for help after the session without feeling anxious or less ‘able’ than their peers. Similarly, the structure of the session and the supplemental materials could be adapted so that all students can benefit from them without necessarily making special arrangements at the point of need. My goal was to achieve inclusivity in both live teaching and in provided learning materials, thereby promoting real equality amongst the participants in my class.

The ideal of inclusivity

Support services for those with disabilities is essential to ensure that disabled students have the same learning opportunities as their peers, and are not disadvantaged by the format of teaching materials, specific classroom activities, teaching delivery or formal assessment. However, it is also interesting to note that laudable attempts to help could potentially create a stigmatising effect—simply by creating these additional arrangements and adjustments, students with disabilities are different from their peers and different arrangements must be made for them. Ann Davis in her paper on invisible disability calls the idea of special needs ‘offensive and patronising’ – that it ‘others’ individuals rather than promoting true equality among students (Davis, 2005). This dichotomy is also reflected by the Equality Act and the protected characteristics specified therein (Great Britain, 2010) These are designed to legislate against discriminatory practices, and I believe are absolutely necessary in protecting against deliberate disadvantage and mistreatment as a result of a disability. However, putting individuals into protected groups cannot help but highlight the differences between these groups and those outside them. As Gordon and Rosenblum, cited in Beatty and Kirby (2006) note, ‘being part of a legally protected class challenges any possibility of equality.’ Is it possible, that even through a desire to help, our behaviour changes significantly when teaching a disabled student – are we over-kind, too over-eager to help, in short, are we reacting to their disability rather than the student as an individual? Borland’s study (1999) acknowledges that
a lack of staff training and disability awareness could lead to educators ‘reacting to the student as someone in need of care rather than as a person who has rights.’ If this is the case, these reactions are largely unconscious on our part, but in considering what an inclusive service really is, I think it is important to reflect on and challenge our own behaviours in this area.

Inclusivity as a practice should provide adjusted support for disabled students whilst also protecting the idea of equality amongst the cohort as a whole. This can be done by making changes to teaching style, class structure and supplemental learning materials prior to the start of teaching. The changes will not be obvious, or provided only to students with disclosed disabilities, but will be invisible. The aim of these changes is to provide materials and learning opportunities which can be used effectively by all students, both disabled and non-disabled. It requires us to be proactive in adapting our teaching and learning tools, rather than reactively making changes when asked (Black, 2004; Applin, 1999; Silver et al., 1998). I believe that this would help ameliorate any difficulties experienced by non-disclosing students and provide effective support for them: this approach purposely does not single anyone out from the student cohort as a ‘special case’ and does not require anyone to disclose a disability if that is their preference.

**Adopting inclusivity in my teaching practice**

The sessions for the first year dental students are structured around some discussion of theory (for example how to organise a literature search) and a step by step demonstration of a search on a health database such as Medline which the students can follow. After this, students get into groups to complete a task (locating information to solve a clinical question) and finally all students will be prompted to spend the remainder of the time using the techniques learned in the session to start a search for their project topics.

Supplemental material includes a printed workbook with detailed guidance on using the Medline database, and a general guide to health databases which are also available from the Library Services home page.

**The classroom**

The first change I made was to the slides and my initial presentation. Literature on learning and behavioural disorders note the potential problems of language when teaching, particularly using figures of speech and metaphor (Black, 2004; Taylor, 2005). Having taught this session for several years, I run the class from memory rather than using a script. Although this means I’m not consulting notes during a class, I could unconsciously be using figurative language, or library jargon which could potentially be misunderstood or misinterpreted. Therefore I reviewed the PowerPoint slides and re-worded any text which might have a double meaning, eg the bullet point ‘currency’ which referred to the need to use journal articles as well as textbooks, I changed to ‘Up to date information’. References to the College’s password authentication system ‘Shibboleth’ were changed to ‘King’s username and password’. I also made sure that the learning outcomes at the start of the presentation were clearly defined and that the session followed the plan set out on that particular slide (Applin, 1999).

Secondly, I wrote out my script from memory as though I was speaking to a class and was able to review what I typically said during these sessions. This alerted me to my tendency
to overuse colloquialisms whilst teaching, so I re-worded jargon, figures of speech to make clear my meaning and the processes I was describing. I also decided that students should be encouraged to use recording tools if they chose so they could replay the class at a later date (Applin, 1999) and that they would be informed of this via a pre-course general email distributed via the School year administrator.

I also tried to reconsider the organisation of the group work. This is a useful method of learning by peer support, but could potentially cause discomfort or confusion for some disabled students, for example those with autistic spectrum disorders, social anxiety or obsessive compulsive disorder (Taylor, 2005). As this component has proved useful in the past and is popular with student participants, rather than removing it, I decided to improve my awareness of how different disorders may present, (through research as well as liaison with the College disability services) This improvement in my knowledge would then enable me to monitor group interactions and make adjustments should I notice that one member of a group seems isolated (for example by suggesting that smaller tasks are assigned to each member to research by themselves, as opposed to doing the whole task as one group).

**The learning materials**

Materials provided are typically printed, or available online in PDF format. Nancy Black’s research in this area found that certain disorders create visual processing problems such as letter reversals, or mixing up word parts (Black, 2004). On the Web Accessibility Initiative website, it is suggested that documents should be provided in different formats and properly marked up and fully customisable so that students are able to make changes to suit their own learning styles (Abou-Zahra, 2012).

Having reviewed my materials in the context of disability support, it became obvious that they were fairly limited in format. To improve this, I ensured that the printed material was available in Word format and that the documents could be customised as required. As later versions of Adobe Acrobat contain a ‘Read Out Loud’ tool, I will continue to provide guides in Adobe format and instructions on how to access this feature. In addition, I intend to experiment with audio transcripts using Camtasia software and pilot this during the autumn term, in liaison with my colleagues from Library Services.

The workbook is a combination of text and screenshots, but a review of this document shows that it is fairly text heavy, particularly when explaining techniques for literature searching. I decided to keep the workbook but also create a new document which illustrated the process of literature searching step by step using screen shots and very little text. This document is intended to act as a memory aid for all students and to provide additional support for those with visual processing difficulties, or whose first language is not English.

**Conclusion**

The learning process should be ‘a quality experience for all students without having to discriminate between disabled and non-disabled students’ (Madriaga et al., 2011). Through considering my teaching practice and the notion of inclusivity, I’ve attempted and continue to attempt to make these small and unobtrusive changes to my delivery of teaching and the learning materials which
I hope will enhance the learning experience, not just for students with disclosed or undisclosed disabilities, but all students in the class. I will aim to make these changes part of my everyday practice, rather than for special cases, and thereby achieve genuine equality in the classroom.

**Top tips for teaching practice in the context of diversity**

- Prior to the start of the session, ensure that your materials are available online, and in a range of formats (eg enlarged font for partially sighted students, or with coloured backgrounds for students with dyslexia). Check with your disability advisor about the best formatting to use.
- At the start of the session, I show my students the materials I have uploaded and give them the opportunity to download the slides so they can follow along on their own computers. Student feedback has indicated that they like being able to flip through the slides at their own pace, go backwards and forwards and follow links provided in the presentation.
- Do not make assumptions about the students’ backgrounds, knowledge or level of comfort during the class – ie do not assume that a disabled student is struggling or that a student from another country is not following you. Singling people out for special attention could cause discomfort or embarrassment, and might be unnecessary.
- Instead make sure that your session includes a range of activities to suit different learning styles. These could be anything from peer support through group work, an elearning task, a printed work sheet, live polling and self-directed learning. During breaks and task time, make it clear that students can ask you questions individually if they choose.
- If you have a PowerPoint presentation, use it as a prompt rather than as an information document – include pictures, quizzes or graphs as a method of disseminating the information. Text-heavy presentations can be off-putting, and can be difficult for students to read, especially in large lecture theatres and computing rooms.

**Bibliography**


Review: Unseen disabilities and inclusive practices in higher education: The case of epilepsy

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Introduction
Generally described as an ‘unseen disability’ – alongside other common chronic conditions, such as diabetes or asthma – epilepsy is characterized by a distinctive protean nature that defies classification. It is a neurological disease with frequent psychiatric implications; it is chronic, but its most noticeable manifestations, ie seizures, are episodic and some patients can grow out of it. As Rhodes, Nocon, Small and Wright (2008) remark, ‘[e]pilepsy, lying somewhere within the disputed margins between disability and illness, mental illness and disability, has no natural home.’

The purpose of this paper is to examine the challenges that this multifaceted and elusive condition poses to students in higher education. Though not all forms of epilepsy affect the ability to study and many students with epilepsy might reject the label ‘disabled,’ the Equality Act 2010 entitles them to reasonable adjustments and Disabled Students’ Allowance (DSA). This raises a number of interesting research questions: does the traditional stigmatization of people with epilepsy impact on students’ decision to disclose their condition in their applications? What kind of support can facilitate their participation in higher education? Which inclusive practices can help circumvent indirect discrimination of students with epilepsy?

Starting with a brief survey of disability scholarship on epilepsy, I will address these issues, drawing on data collected from disability officers in UK universities and the leading charity Epilepsy Society, as well as interviews with university students with epilepsy, publicly available online (Youth Health Talk, 2008). I will reflect on how an accurate assessment of the needs of students with epilepsy will help me rethink my own teaching within the Department of Comparative Literature at King’s College London.

Epilepsy: A disability?
In their article on the development of provision for disabled university students in Scotland and England, Tinklin, Riddell and Wilson (2004) outline an unsatisfactory paradigm shift from individual support to inclusive academic environments. These two conceptions of provision derive from, correspondingly, the medical and the social model of disability, two of the main theoretical perspectives on the nature of disability. As it appears from their respective names, the first model revolves around the medical condition (or impairment) that renders a body disabled, while the latter emphasizes the role of society in excluding disabled people from spaces, groups and activities (Grewal et al., 2002).¹ Tinklin, Riddell and Wilson (2004) highlight the potential normativizing

¹ Alongside the medical and social model of disability, they also mention the arguably less common ‘charity’ and ‘mutuality’ perspectives (Grewal et al., 2002: 12).
risk in addressing medically derived ‘special needs’ for disabled students in higher education and advocate institutional change that would ultimately benefit all students. At the same time, the authors show awareness of some possible unique needs and do not discard entirely the validity of individual support. It could be put into practice with the adoption of individual learning plans, which, according to Matthews (2009) ‘indicate a key shift towards a strategy for supporting a variety of students in a way which minimises reliance of labels and assumptions that particular medical diagnoses tell teachers all they need to know about students’ needs.’ This refined perspective would be greatly beneficial in the case of students with epilepsy, as I will illustrate further.

First of all, the problematic position of epilepsy within the disability discourse cannot be overemphasized. In the abovementioned pivotal article, Rhodes, Nocon, Small and Wright (2008) report the following comment by a person with epilepsy on an online forum: ‘We are eyed suspiciously by both the disabled and the non-disabled communities and welcome by neither.’ Neither the medical model of impairment nor the social model of disability seems to describe exhaustively what happens in epilepsy. If we think of either a loss or difference of function (impairment) or a loss or limitation of equal social opportunities (disability), these are only temporary in the case of epilepsy, ie they usually surface around the occurrence of a seizure (Rhodes, Nocon, Small and Wright, 2008). Researchers have also found that patients’ own fear of epilepsy and its unpredictability often translates into cases of self-imposed disability (Mittan and Locke 1986; Scambler 1989; Jacoby et al. 2004). Worldwide prejudice surrounding epilepsy affects patients’ lives, too: epilepsy has been described as ‘a stigmatizing condition par excellence’ (Baker et al. 1997). Accordingly, research literature shows that many adolescents keep their epilepsy a secret in order to avoid discrimination (MacLeod and Austin 2003). When it comes to university applications, this raises the issue of disclosure: should all students with epilepsy disclose their condition, regardless of their level of seizure control and of the specific educational activities and settings of their course? For example, should a geography student inform their instructor about their epilepsy before a fieldwork trip, if they usually only have seizures at night? An Epilepsy Society survey highlighted that many students with epilepsy, uncomfortable with the label ‘disabled’, do not disclose their illness and miss out on crucial support provided by university disability services or via the Disabled Students’ Allowances (DSA) (Epilepsy Society, 2011).

Holly,2 one of the students interviewed for Youth Health Talk (2008), thus explains her decision:

   But I did it all myself, and I just wouldn’t accept any help and I was really stubborn and I think part of it was because I didn’t want it always to be, ‘Oh well you know [Holly] is doing well but she’s got epilepsy, so that means she’s doing really well considering.’

Holly’s desire not to be patronised or pitied calls for further reflection on the competitive atmosphere in colleges that might favour indirect discrimination of disabled students with their own non-normative learning style and pace. Conversely, a more relaxed and welcoming environment might encourage students with epilepsy (as well as those with other disabilities) to speak openly about their condition, rather than to ‘pass’ as non-disabled (Goffman,

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2. Some interviewees on youthhealthtalkonline have consented to the use of their real first name, others have preferred pseudonyms. However, there is no indication on the website that allows readers to know whether an interviewee is identified by their real name or pseudonym.
This is the topic of ‘University Challenge’, a recent awareness campaign organized by Epilepsy Society in the UK with the aim of promoting disclosure and access to support in higher education (Epilepsy Society, 2011). It is nonetheless difficult to reconcile one’s own sense of identity with institutional constraints; Fuller et al. (2009) found out in their study that the whole idea of providing reasonable adjustments for disabled students relies on institutional pigeonholing: ‘Many students were unhappy about having to accept the label of disability which was a pre-requisite for a request of an adjustment.’

**Reasonable adjustments and support for students with epilepsy**

The same study also draws attention to the controversial issue of standardised approaches to reasonable adjustments that only rarely suit students with such a varied condition such as epilepsy (Fuller et al., 2009). The authors here base their claims on the experiences of two British university students with epilepsy, Teresa and Dermot: interestingly, Teresa felt she could only complete assignments with extended deadlines, while Dermot had never requested any extra time. A further confirmation of ineffective standardisation was that he appreciated extended examination time, while Teresa deemed this adjustment an unfair advantage over other students (Fuller et al., 2009).

Their considerations are in line with some of the interviews on Youth Health Talk (2008): for example, an anonymous participant comments on routine extended examination time, ‘If you have extra time but you can’t stay awake for more than three hours, and you can’t concentrate, being given the option for four and a half hours or something isn’t actually going to help you.’ A better solution in her case was the opportunity to write her exam paper at home, while Paddy, another interviewee, enjoyed the possibility of taking short breaks in a separate room that would ease his possibly seizure-inducing stress during the examination (Youth Health Talk, 2008).

As the Epilepsy Society resource documents for universities state, ‘[b]y individualising support you can avoid making judgments about what someone might need just because they have epilepsy’ (Epilepsy Society, 2011). In order to guarantee that all students with epilepsy participate fully in university activities and make the most of this educational experience, tailor-made support must be provided at different levels: accommodation, health and safety and course adjustments. Seizures might significantly affect short-term memory, concentration and ability to attend lectures: so, apart from the abovementioned assessment adjustments, these difficulties can be overcome by means of technological equipment (eg dictaphones), support workers (eg notetakers) and special infrastructural arrangements (eg risk assessment in laboratories or alarm systems in residence rooms).

Some less obvious solutions have also proved successful. The Disability Advisory Service at Oxford University facilitates joint accommodation for students with epilepsy and a partner or a friend that acts as a carer: compared to traditional approaches to residence safety – such as a room alarm system or an alarm carried around the neck – this is a much more humane and inclusive form of support (P. Quinn, personal communication, 16 April 2013). Holly from Youth Health Talk, who rejected at first any help that would belittle her academic achievements, finally applied for her DSA and received, among other forms of support, a substantial book allowance. Being able to buy all her books meant that she could study from home, after recovering from her seizures, despite her drug-induced fatigue and without being
constrained by the library opening hours. She was also supported by a librarian that helped her find texts remotely (Youth Health Talk, 2008). Nonetheless, it is worth noting here that some personalized measures are likely to increase the visibility of disabled students and might engender indirect discrimination: as Teresa points out regarding her examination taking place in a special room, ‘they do put me in a separate room which kind of felt a bit odd... Because it’s full on segregation... They are putting me in the freak room’ (Fuller et al., 2009).

Rethinking my teaching to better include students with epilepsy
Reading the testimonies of students with epilepsy for this paper was an eye-opening experience that has helped me recognize how the needs of students with unseen, possibly undisclosed, disabilities can be easily overlooked in the classroom. More specifically, I have realized how my own teaching of Comparative Literature relies heavily on the use of short-term memory and concentration for classroom activities that might involuntarily penalize students with different learning patterns.

A sample session in one of my modules for the BA programme in Comparative Literature at King’s, for example, includes a brief theoretical introduction of a new text that students have read in advance, a more detailed presentation of some key features of the text, a group activity of textual analysis, followed by class discussion and conceptual wrap-up with a question and answer session. During the group activity, I usually project a PowerPoint slide with a list of the textual features my students have been invited to look for: I thought that this list, combined with the notes they had taken during my introduction of the text, would serve as a helpful reminder and support during their analysis. It is now clear to me that this approach takes for granted my students’ ability to quickly take effective notes, use their short-term memory to absorb new concepts and vocabulary, and constantly concentrate for at least the first hour of class: as highlighted in the interviews on Youth Health Talk (2008), it is unlikely that a student under treatment for active epilepsy will easily display this combination of skills.

Though being informed beforehand of students’ special needs can help lecturers tackle specific issues in the classroom, we should also respect some students’ reluctance to identify as disabled and to disclose what might be, in some epilepsies, only temporary or intermittent difficulties. From this perspective, removing ‘barriers to learning’ (Fuller et al. 2004) by making a better use of resources (such as the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), handouts, PowerPoint and time management) would create a more inclusive environment to the benefit of all students, regardless of their declared disability status. For example, my students can usually find basic information about the topic of the session and preparatory reading on the VLE: in the light of what I have learned about students with seizures in the left temporal lobe of the brain – which will make it hard for them to remember words (Epilepsy Society, 2011), I should also include a glossary of new terms to be introduced during the session. At the same time, it would be helpful to find digital copies of handouts on the VLE: I do not usually upload them in advance, but distribute them in class. If a student is absent, I am always happy to send them a copy via email, but I now realize that if a student skips a significant number of sessions because of a health condition, they might find it embarrassing to request a copy of the handout each time via email. The layout of my handouts could be equally improved by adding as many instructions as necessary, so that an absent student can easily reproduce the same activity remotely, even if they missed my oral inputs in the classroom.
Furthermore, before learning about technological support for students with epilepsy, I would have probably been taken aback by a student’s request to audio-record my session: I would now be careful not to look uncooperative, thereby forcing them to disclose uncomfortable details of their condition. I could also make a better use of my PowerPoint slides by including not just lists of new terms, but concise definitions, too: this would help students concentrate and take more useful notes. It would be likewise worth scheduling a Q&A slot right before the analysis, in order to clear up any questions or concerns at this initial stage and facilitate all students’ involvement in the following group activity. Lastly, from now on, when I am assigned a new classroom, I will always check in advance how to get to a quieter space (eg a common room), where a student might recover after a seizure.

In conclusion, a better knowledge of the all too often overlooked difficulties experienced by students with epilepsy has certainly prompted me to reflect on how to embed inclusive practices in the mainstream educational offer, so that ideally fewer and fewer adjustments for disabled students will be needed in the future. Vickerman and Blundell (2010) rightly maintain that ‘the ideal of creating fully inclusive institutions in which anticipatory adjustments are embedded will clearly take some time to achieve.’ At the same time, I believe that epilepsy, with its problematic socio-cultural history and unseen nature, could function as an ideal testing ground for the implementation of these anticipatory equality practices in higher education, without neglecting the uniqueness of each disabled student’s experience we still need to attend to.

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**Top tips for teaching students with epilepsy**

1. **Diversify classroom activities and assessments**
   
   Epilepsy is often associated with memory problems and learning difficulties. Some anti-epileptic drugs can also affect concentration levels. Consequently, students with epilepsy might not be able to take notes as quickly as their classmates or retain new information effectively. In addition, the stress that surrounds examinations and submission deadlines might impact negatively on their seizures.

   **Put it into practice:** Provide a glossary of new terms. Include instructions for classroom tasks on a slide or a handout. Encourage group work for classroom activities. Make sure classroom activities do not rely heavily on students’ short-term memory. Inform your class beforehand, if you intend to show flashing or flickering images (though photosensitive epilepsy is far less frequent than what is commonly believed, and LCD and plasma screens are usually safe). Discuss in advance with each student with epilepsy any adjustment that would help them complete assignments (eg extra time, breaks during examination, home-written essay instead of exam paper, etc.)

2. **Help minimize the impact of health-related non-attendance**
   
   Students with active epilepsy are likely to miss classes, because of their seizures. They might sometimes need to leave a class early, if they feel unwell.

   **Put it into practice:** Store relevant resources on the Virtual Learning Environment (eg PowerPoint slides, handouts, etc.). Welcome class audio-recording or the presence of a note-taker. Be available for one-to-one tutorials.
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Reflective case study: Supporting the information literacy needs of distance learning Medical students

Clare Crowley
Library Services

In this case study I will looking at how best to support the information literacy needs of distance learning medical students. In order to do this I have reviewed the literature to find out about good practice in this area, and I discuss how I’ve incorporated best practice into the support that I give to this particular cohort of students.

As Information Specialist for Medicine at King’s College London, I provide information literacy teaching and resources. Information literacy has been defined as ‘knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner’ (Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals, 2004). These skills are essential for all students, enabling students to find the most relevant information and to carry out research to the high standards expected. In the King’s Technology-Enhanced Learning Benchmarking Report, the vision for information literacy is for all students to have it embedded within their Curriculum, as currently that is not the case for all courses (Hatzipanagos et al., 2010).

Information literacy skills are particularly crucial for distance learners, especially as it has been found that; ‘rather than access the online library database, distance students are more likely to employ generic search engines in their research quests, making more critical the need for information literacy’ (Van de Vord, 2010).

For medical students it is essential that they know how to find the best available medical evidence needed for research, and also be able to appraise it. In many cases for those who are studying and working, they need to have strong information literacy skills for evidence based medical practice as well. (Brettle and Raynor, 2013). As the medical student’s research can ultimately affect patient care, these skills are of vital importance.

One of the Medical MSc courses that I teach is mostly a distance learning course, where the students come to the university for a few weeks of classes in the year but otherwise will disperse to countries around the world, as well as the UK. This blended learning approach is now more common, involving a mixture of online and face to face teaching (Lyons and Warlick, 2013).

I provide a single, half day face to face session; there isn’t room for more than that in the very packed timetable. This ‘one shot’ session covers information literacy skills such as database
searching and bibliographic software. The challenges are that within the session there is a great deal of information for students to take in at once, particularly as they get to grips with a new course and an intense schedule. Equally it is not possible to cover all the aspects of these skills that are particularly needed by medical students.

The students are a diverse group, from many countries, and with different educational and cultural backgrounds. They have varying levels of information literacy and IT skills, especially as some are mature students who are returning to education after a period of time. This also raises challenges, as even with two teachers present many of the students need extensive individual help, which can be hard to provide within the time limits of the session.

In order to meet the educational outcomes stated by the UK Professional Standards Framework, and provide ‘equality of opportunity for learners’ and to ‘respect individual learners and diverse learning communities’ (Higher Education Academy, 2011), I needed to ensure that distance learners, who don’t get the same opportunity for face to face support throughout the course, were provided with good support by other means.

I realised that it may be better to view the session more as an opportunity for me to flag up further support for students, that they can use throughout the course, rather than hope to cover all the aspects of information literacy that are needed in one afternoon. For the support after the session there were user guides and information on the library web pages, but this wasn’t sufficient and needed to be enhanced. To this end I needed to develop better online information literacy support for students. I carried out a review of the literature to find out best practice in supporting information literacy (IL) for this group of learners, so I could ensure that my own teaching and teaching materials met their needs.

**Online information literacy support**

As distance learners, like any others, have different needs and learning styles, there needs to be a range of media to help develop their IL skills and meet these varied requirements (Dewald, 1999; Tang and Tseng, 2013).

This range of media may include online tutorials, videos, user guides, and webinars. These technologies lend themselves well to information literacy support and ‘As information and communication technologies have become widely adopted, information literacy (IL) has become a crucial component of learning and teaching in e-environments’ (Nazari, 2011). My aim was to develop a toolkit of these media to fully support the distance learners.

The advantage of online modules and videos is that students can access these at a time when it is best for them. They are of particular benefit for distance learners, as they can ‘reach distance students otherwise unreach’ (Lyons and Warlick, 2013). There is a great deal of research on the successful use of online tutorials and videos for literature and database searching. The benefit for all students, and not just distance learners, is the flexibility to use them when they want, and to come back to them as many times as they need (Kumar and Ochoa, 2012). As summarised by Anderson, in a study looking at the development of an online information literacy tutorial: ‘Online tutorials are effective teaching tools for
information literacy... students like the flexibility when they have a need for the information, and as frequently as possible to understand the concepts’ (2012).

Thus the literature strongly supports the use of online tutorials as a key method of support for distance learners. Research has shown that online information literacy tutorials can be effective as face to face instruction, so they are certainly worth the effort and time spent creating them. For medical students these may be tutorials on how to carry out literature searching, systematic review searching, how to use bibliographic software or critically appraise the medical literature. A study focusing on medical students found that both face to face and online sessions improved their knowledge of PubMed (the key medical bibliographic database) and that the students were satisfied with online tutorials (Schimming, 2008). An online tutorial that is available for students whenever they need it can have the added advantage of helping them become ‘competent evidence based practitioners’ (Brettle and Raynor, 2013), which is of great benefit for medical students.

The online modules are therefore very useful for the reasons outlined above. However, medical graduate students often value a one to one session with an information specialist to address their own particular search strategy development and other information literacy needs. These appointments are increasingly made for support with medical systematic reviews. For the systematic reviews the searching can be very involved and cover multiple resources, including searching for grey literature, use of search filters and other complex search techniques. It is important that distance learners do not miss out on this tailored one to one support.

To replicate the face to face training session there are now many tools available. Tang found that webinars were something that distance learners were prepared to engage with to improve their library skills (Tang and Tseng, 2013). It is important to offer webinars to distance learners to give them the equal opportunity for learners that is recommended by the HE framework (Higher Education Academy, 2011).

Although I’ve offered distance students support via Skype, there hasn’t been much uptake for this. However if I was to offer a formal and regular programme of webinars, that were promoted to the students, then this would be likely to change. From the literature and also from my own experience, the challenges presented by webinars have been sound problems, time delays in different countries and lack of participation (Tang and Tseng, 2013). The elements of a successful webinar as also outlined by Tang include active learning and interaction, with a session that has been tailored for a specific audience (2013).

Providing the option of a webinar as well as online tutorials is essential as not every student will take to the latter, as Ruggeri discovered ‘It should not be assumed that everyone benefits from e-learning... many students reported negative opinions of e-learning resources’ (Ruggeri et al., 2013).

**Building links with faculty**

One key element that emerged from the literature was the importance of building strong links with faculty in order for the information literacy support and resources created to actually
be utilised by students. Many studies noted that successful uptake of online resources by students was dependent on collaboration between the faculty and the Information Specialist (Kirkwood, 2006; Calverley and Shephard, 2003). If these connections are not built, and there is a lack of academic feedback and buy in, the online tutorial may fail due to disregard and ambivalence from the faculty (Anderson and Mitchell, 2012; Appelt and Pendell, 2010).

There is not just the usage and awareness aspect however, but also working with the faculty to help with the content itself, finding out more about assignments so that the content is more relevant, (Lyons and Warlick, 2013) and also to determine when course work and project deadlines are so that the librarian can send out reminders of the online materials in a timely way.

The benefits of having an online module is that the need to liaise with the faculty over it in itself drives and generates an increased collaboration, (Lyons and Warlick, 2013; DaCosta and Jones, 2007). It reinforces relations with the course departments (Muir and Heller-Ross, 2010) which can be invaluable for determining the needs of the students and is generally a much sought after outcome for an Information Specialist.

By working with faculty much can be determined about the particulars of the course, but to develop the best resources and support it is also essential to find out more from the students themselves; ‘For distance learners without physical access to a library, the Internet becomes the primary sources for information acquisition. Hence, understanding distance learners’ online information seeking capabilities and experience will help librarians to develop instructional courses that can enhance students’ information literacy skills.’ (Tang and Tseng, 2013).

Developing this understanding can be done in a number of ways, by gathering student feedback both verbally in training sessions, and afterwards via evaluation forms, and by sending surveys and questionnaires. It is a more challenging task with distance learners, as some methods that would be useful are not really possible, such as setting up focus groups. It may not be enough to create a tutorial before the course, but to be responsive to student needs throughout the course and provide further tutorials, or edit existing ones if needs be (Kumar and Ochoa, 2012).

**Applying the theory to the practice**

Before I made any changes I started by having a discussion with the faculty about the particular needs of the students, and course content, so I could build up a better picture of their requirements. As well as addressing the support students needed once they were learning from a distance, I also needed to re-evaluate the one face to face session they had with me. As previously discussed, in this single session I had with this diverse cohort of distance learning medical MSc students, there were challenges for a number of reasons. These included the varied levels of information literacy and IT skills the students had; that there was a great deal of information to cover in one afternoon, and that not all of the key medical topics, such as critical appraisal (Van de Vord, 2010), could be covered. I decided to completely review the session, reflecting on the needs of the students and changing the session where necessary to incorporate best practice.

To immediately engage the students and introduce one of the topics of the session, I used a web based polling system called Poll Everywhere. It can be used to create polls that students can
answer anonymously and therefore more openly. I posed the following question: ‘How confident do you feel searching databases for journal articles?’ This enabled me to gauge confidence levels, and also it was a good way to involve the students and kick start a brief discussion about experience of database searching, thus employing an active learning technique.

I introduced an interactive online module that incorporated quizzes, which the students worked through whilst in the session. This meant that the session was more interactive and engaging, and students could get immediate feedback during the quiz. It also meant that the students were aware of the module and others in the same location so may return to it if they wished.

So the session, as well as being an opportunity to provide face to face information literacy instruction for these students, also served as a springboard for future learning, as students were now familiar with using the online module and knew where it was located for future reference.

The feedback from the students about the session was much improved. There was also recognition and very positive feedback from the academic leading the course, who went on to recommend the session to other academics in the medical postgraduate taught teaching committee.

Following best practice from the literature, I also created a series of short, modular tutorials, which can be used independently from each other (Anderson and Mitchell, 2012). These were interactive, with quizzes as with the first module I created to use in the session. As multimedia is always highly recommended as a teaching tool, there were links where appropriate to video as well (Pintz and Posey, 2013; Anderson and Mitchell, 2012). The modules covered information literacy topics of benefit to medical students such as literature searching, systematic review searching and using bibliographic software.

In order to build a ‘tool kit’ consisting of a range of support to cover the varied needs of distance learners, I also provided user guides for the topics listed above. In addition to this I’ve developed a new Medical Subject guide, using the LibGuides platform, which has web pages on all of these areas, with links to the user guides and videos, and information about the online modules. The Medical Subject Guide is available here: http://libguides.kcl.ac.uk/Medicine. LibGuides are widely used in Libraries as a supplement to webinars (Tang and Tseng, 2013) and bring everything together in one package, so that one link to the guide can be added to a course VLE, webpage, or course handbook.

As the literature has demonstrated how crucial faculty championing of the materials is, now that the resources have been developed I will arrange a meeting to show the course administrators and academics what is available, to get the links to the online tutorials and the Libguides embedded in the course VLE, and to ensure that the online modules are recommended and promoted by the lecturers.

**Evaluation**

To evaluate the teaching materials I added a link to a brief survey, using SurveyMonkey. I kept the questions to a minimum, including only those I considered essential. Too many questions may prevent students giving feedback, especially with the issue of survey fatigue which has increased with developments in technology, and the ease of sending online surveys (Adams and Umbach, 2012).
I have also observed and gathered verbal feedback from students in face to face sessions, and have adapted the online modules accordingly, such as adding more images and screen shots and rewording questions if they didn’t seem clear.

**Conclusion**

When looking to provide support for distance learning students in this case study, it was discovered that online information literacy tutorials have been found to be as effective as face to face tuition. However, essential to the success of these resources is validation from the faculty, so close links in order to do this are being built. These users are a diverse group, and as a teaching professional it was important to map to the Higher Education framework learning indicators to support this group. A key way to do so was to provide a range of online support that had been tailored to the students needs, as well as revising the face to face information literacy training I provided for these students.

So now that the support for distance learners has been developed, by following best practice outlined in the literature, the next stage will be to evaluate the support on offer and to keep adapting and responding to the needs of the students. It is a continual process of active research, and the importance of this process cannot be underestimated, as Tang states ‘No matter what type of instruction is offered, the bottom line is that it should be designed around the principle of tailoring itself to students’ interests, helping them save time in their struggle to find information.’ (2013).

**Top Tips**

- Ensure that you have a good range of alternative teaching materials, such as interactive online modules, video and printable online guides to meet different learning needs. This will be useful for all students, but particularly distance learners.
- Ensure that distance learning students can still benefit from ‘face to face’ interaction with a teacher, by giving them the option of Skype appointments.
- An effective screen capture tool, such as Snagit [www.techsmith.com/snagit.html](http://www.techsmith.com/snagit.html) can be invaluable, as it will allow you to easily edit screen captures, add annotations and also save your images within it for future use. Adding plenty of images and screen captures is essential for clarity, whether you are creating a user guide, online module or sending students an email with instructions.
- Pilot and test your online materials. Test on students, colleagues and update materials as a continual process. Add a link to an online evaluation form, such as a SurveyMonkey form, to your online modules or website in order to gather more feedback.
- If you have some face to face sessions with students, incorporate an activity using the online modules into these classes. It will not only add an interactive element to the session, but that way students will be familiar with how to access these resources when they are working on their own, and may be more likely to use them.
- Promote your TEL resources – email students at appropriate times (i.e. before certain assignments are due, or when they will be revising), and put information and links to resources in multiple places. If other staff are involved with teaching the students, ensure that staff are fully aware of the resources available so that they can promote them as well.
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Review: To MOOC or not to MOOC: Issues to consider for would-be MOOC academic leads

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Massive online open courses or MOOCs are seen as the ‘tipping point’ in Higher Education. The aim of this paper is to introduce the MOOC technology landscape, present the theoretical and empirical literature around MOOCs, including an exploration of the debate surrounding their usefulness, sustainability and metrics for success. The author is a Lead Educator for the KCL Medicines Adherence MOOC on the FutureLearn platform and will use this as a case study to highlight additional issues that academics may wish to consider before they enter MOOC territory.

Defining MOOCs
MOOCs can be characterised as follows (from EUA Council, 2013):

- Have no participation limit ie can be massive
- They are available online
- With no formal entry requirement ie open

They are typically also:

- Free of charge
- Non-credit bearing

Futurelearn is the first UK-led online platform and to date provides courses developed by 26 universities, including King’s College London. In its first 24 hours, it had 24,000 registered students from 158 countries (ICEF Monitor, 2013). The Futurelearn platform is owned by the Open University and counts the British Council, British Library and British Museum as their partners to share their content and will collaborate on the development of courses. However, Futurelearn is considered to be ‘late to the MOOCs party – playing catch up with the likes of Coursera and Udacity’ (TechCrunch, 2013).

The term MOOC was originally coined to describe the format pioneered by George Siemens and Stephen Downes for an online course *Connectivism and Connective Knowledge* by the University of Manitoba. The course was taken by 25 fee paying students and was offered for free to over 2,300 members of the general public (InformationWeek, 2013). This type of MOOC was based on connectivist principles that emphasised learning occurs through network connections, as learners connect with others and share their knowledge resources.
So-called cMOOCs or connectivist MOOCs are based on a pedagogical model of peer learning (UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013). In contrast, xMOOCs with its emphasis on knowledge acquisition, rather than knowledge creation (Siemens, 2012), are online versions of traditional instructivist learning formats and it is this version of MOOCs that have caught the public’s attention (EUA Council, 2013). This format has been adopted by the three largest platform providers edX, Udacity and Coursera with FutureLearn, also belonging to this group (UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013). The traditional learning approach is evidenced through video presentations of lectures, short quizzes and testing (EUA Council, 2013). Siemens (2012) stated ‘put another way, cMOOCs focus on knowledge creation and generation whereas xMOOCs focus on knowledge duplication’ which highlights the pedagogical approach of transferring knowledge from teacher to student. From this point forward, when this paper refers to MOOCs it will refer to xMOOCs given the case study will be about a MOOC on the FutureLearn platform.

Issues to consider

Models of financially sustainable MOOCs are still in development

According to Department for Business, Innovation and Skills report (2013): ‘leading US universities, are widely engaging enthusiastically in MOOCs by lending brand, content, funds, staff, badging and policy support ‘ (p. 4; emphasis added). In a Times Higher article, one academic from the University of Edinburgh stated that each MOOC cost approximately £30,000 from development to delivery (Times Higher Education, 2013). Revenue streams for universities are currently unclear. There is great debate around whether MOOCs will encourage enrolment onto traditional fee-based university courses or drive them away (Daniel, 2012). Arguably the ‘open’ nature of MOOCs means that not all MOOC students would fulfil the entry criteria for traditional fee-based courses. Potential revenue streams may more likely result from products within the MOOC landscape. For example, in the US, Coursera earned $US220,000 in the first quarter after it launched a programme called Signature Track which awards students with completion certificates. It also earns cash from Amazon.com if those registered on the course buy books on the MOOC reading list (ICEF Monitor, 2013).

Completion rates may be low

Early numbers suggest that the rate of attrition of MOOCs is high. According to Daniel (2012), MIT and Coursera have had to defend staggering rates of attrition from their courses. In MIT’s 6.002x Circuits and Electronics course, there were 155,000 registered students. Of these, 23,000 tried the first problem set, 9,000 passed the mid-term assessment with only 7,157 passing the final assessment and successfully completing the course (Daniel, 2012) [This works out to be an attrition rate of approximately 95 per cent, assuming all registered students actually started the course]. However, MIT have been keen to point out that ‘if you look at the number in absolute terms, it’s as many students as might take the course in 40 years in MIT’ (Hardesty, 2012 in Daniel, 2012). A Coursera-UC Berkeley course on Software Engineering reported a similar successful completion rate of 7 per cent (Meyer, 2012 in Daniel, 2012).
More recently, the University of Edinburgh have conducted a review on their initial offering of six courses on the US platform Coursera – the first UK Coursera MOOCs to be assessed. These included courses on: artificial intelligence, astrobiology, critical thinking, e-learning and digital cultures, philosophy and equine nutrition. Over 308,000 students registered for these five week courses and early analysis suggested an average completion rate of 12 percent (Parr, 2013).

**Level of engagement varies with the type of MOOC student**

In defence of the high attrition rates, a closer analysis of the activity profile of learners is necessary. For example, according to a preliminary report published by Edinburgh focussing on learners who registered for Edinburgh MOOCs and accessed the course site [which amounts to 123,816 active learners], the number of learners who completed the final assessment task across all six courses on offer was 36,266. This represents an average completion rate of 29 per cent of all initial active learners, with a range of 7 to 59 per cent across the six courses (University of Edinburgh, 2013).

In a review of the development of the MOOC by the UK’s Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (2013), the following typology of MOOC students by Phil Hill (blog) is presented (p. 26):

- Lurkers – enrol but just observe or sample a few items at the most
- Drop-Ins – partially or fully active participants for a select topic within the course but do not attempt to complete the entire course
- Passive Participants – students who view a course as content to consume and expect to be taught and tend not to participate in activities or class discussions
- Active Participants – students who fully participate in the MOOC, including consuming content, taking quizzes and exams, writing assignments and peer grading. Actively participate in discussions via social media platforms e.g. Twitter

Given that ‘lurking’ in a MOOC is a common pattern the consensus is that high attrition rates cannot be the only way in which MOOCs are assessed for their quality. It is argued that learners still gain access to high quality material and have the opportunity to observe new learning experiences (UK. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013). However, there are few studies on how people actually learn from MOOCs (Times Higher Education, 2014) with most studies focussing on content and analytics rather than the skills required of the learner (Milligan et al, 2014). When approximately 400 students enrolled on the Fundamentals of Clinical Trials course, developed by Harvard through the edX platform, were surveyed it was found they primarily focussed on completing the course to gain certification so remained ‘passive learners’ (Times Higher Education, 2014).

In a review of MOOC curriculum design conducted by the Open University, Cross (2013) asked actual MOOC participants what criteria should be used to measure the success of a MOOC. The number of respondents were small (46 participants) but appears to be one of the few attempts to gauge learner beliefs on how MOOCs should be assessed. The five most popular criteria were:
• Participation: level, longevity and participation on discussion forums
• Course completion, including achieving the goals set by the course
• Successful use or plan to use in professional practice
• Achievement of deeper understanding of the subject area
• Performance on self-assessment tasks

To date, there are no quality assurance metrics for MOOCs in the way that traditional credit-bearing courses are assessed. For example, there are no league tables of world rankings [eg QS World Rankings; Times Higher Education World University Rankings] or publicly available metrics of user experiences like the National Student Survey in the UK. Furthermore, although learners may have been active participants in the MOOC environment, this does not translate to an activation of this knowledge set in their professional practice.

**Being ‘open’ may not translate into diversity**

At the launch of FutureLearn, David Willets the Minister for Universities and Science said: ‘The UK must be at the forefront of developments in education technology. Massive Open Online Courses represent an opportunity for us to widen access to, and meet the global demand for, higher education. This is growing rapidly in emerging economies in Brazil, India and China’ (King’s College London Press Office, 2012). However, limited analysis of student demographics suggests MOOC learners are already well educated.

In an evaluation of 32 Coursera courses conducted by the University of Pennsylvania, the 34,779 MOOC students surveyed had much higher educational standards compared to those of the general population in their respective countries. 83 per cent of these students, from over 200 countries and territories, already had a college degree; 80 per cent of MOOC students from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa came from the most well educated six per cent of the population (Emanuel, 2013).

Similarly, in a review of the University of Edinburgh’s six Coursera courses, 70 per cent of respondents had previously achieved degree-level study: 30 per cent undergraduate and 40 per cent postgraduate. In addition, 17 per cent were currently employed in the education sector and a further 15 per cent were in full time higher education or further education study. The review also stated: ‘It surprised us that so many of our learners appeared to be very well educated despite the undergraduate entry-level of five of the MOOCs, and this reinforced the implications of ‘open’ for us as educational providers’ (p. 18). Curiously, it refers to this being a possible advantage of a ‘peer support network’ despite the xMOOC format of Coursera courses.

At the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, the open education resources (OER) movement and MOOCs, were described as a form of ‘intellectual neo-colonialism’ (Daniel & Uvalic-Trumbic, 2012 in Daniel, 2012). Bates (2012) argues: ‘Until these institutions are willing to award credit and degrees for this type of programme, we have to believe that they think this is a second class form of education suitable only for the unwashed masses... is it too much to ask for a little humility’. According to Bates (2012), MOOCs cannot be the answer to the challenge of providing higher education in the developing world.
Issues around selectivity in the post-MOOC era

Interestingly, here in the UK institutions that historically have performed well in league tables, i.e., Oxford and Cambridge, University College London and Imperial College London were not listed as initial partners of FutureLearn (The Economist, 2012). Oxford is quoted as saying that MOOCs ‘will not prompt it to change anything’, and that it ‘does not see them as revolutionary in anything other than scale’, and Cambridge stating that ‘it is ‘nonsense’ to see MOOCs as a rival’ as it is ‘not in the business of online education’. It is indicative of one major camp of critique about MOOCs: supposed benefits are already evidenced in open and distance learning innovation and as such, represent victory of ‘packaging over content’ (UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013). As such, MOOCs do not represent a new pedagogy (Bates, 2012).

It could be argued that as the technology landscape continues to evolve, distinctions between this supposed ‘new’ pedagogy and that of the ‘old’ have become increasingly blurred. There are now multiple variations of online course, with some denoting the implementation of selection criteria. SPOCs (small private online courses) on the edX platform restricts access to much smaller numbers by applying a selection process based on academic ability (BBC Business News, 2013). Prof Robert Lue, Faculty Director of HarvardX, is quoted as saying smaller class sizes in SPOCs will allow ‘much more rigorous assessment and greater validation of identity that will be more closely tied to what kind of certification might be possible’ (BBC Business News, 2013). Although these online courses currently remain free, these online courses are no longer ‘massive’ nor ‘open’.

There are also VOOCs® (vocational open online courses), which is a trademark registered by Virtual College, that are intended to revolutionise career guidance by giving learners an insight in working in a particular profession (Virtual College, 2014). This is in addition to the BOOCs (big open online courses), DOCCs (distributed open collaborative courses), SMOCs (synchronous massive online courses) and SOOCs (selective open online courses) (See UK. Department of Education, 2014). Given the suggestion that we are already in a ‘post-MOOC era’ (BBC Business News, 2013) it is clear that there is no one pedagogical model that underlines all online courses and that metrics to judge their success cannot be applied indiscriminately to all.

Summary

Although one of the great advantages of MOOCs is that they are open to all, this could also be its downfall. Learners will have different motivations for registering for courses and this will be heavily influenced by the subject matter under consideration. Given the lack of credit-bearing courses, MOOCs in their current format cannot be seen as an answer for the challenge of providing access to higher education. Specific functionalities of online learning, for example, assessment at home rather than in an exam hall, may be especially useful for students who find exam conditions stressful and underperform as a result. The ability to rewind lectures, or indeed to fast forward, lectures can also be said to increase accessibility. However, revenue streams for MOOCs are still unclear which points to an ambiguity around the purpose of MOOCs and its impact on fee and credit-bearing courses offered by Higher Education institutions. There are also failings around the accreditation of courses and its quality and
sustainability. The pedagogical model inherent in MOOCs must be made clear to those who enrol and the meaning of successful completion of a course needs to be quantified for learners and potential employers, as well as academic leads and course designers alike.

**Case study: King’s College London Medicines Adherence MOOC**

In April 2014, a so-called ‘mini-MOOC’ on Medicines Adherence was launched by King’s with FutureLearn. It consisted of one hour each week of videos and activities for learners over a two week period. It was explicitly designed for healthcare professionals, although it was stated in the introduction pages that non-healthcare professionals ie patients, would also be welcome to register. The course was healthcare professionals with a role or interest in supporting patients with long-term conditions, specifically how to engage patients with long term conditions to self-manage their prescribed treatments and prevent non-adherence to medicines. I was a member of the academic team that was responsible for creating course content, appearing in the videos and facilitated on the discussion boards.

Course analytics showed that 5,056 learners registered for the course and 2,509 learners (50 per cent) engaged in the course, of these 1,102 learners completed the course representing a completion rate of 22 per cent (IPS MOOC Development Strategy Report, 2014). Although this is higher than previously reported, this may represent the vocational nature of the MOOC. Comments indicated that the vast majority of learners were healthcare professionals and that some were practising outside of the UK – as indicated by learners’ comments freely given. However, there was very little interaction between learners and the reduction of postings on discussion boards is likely to reflect the attrition rate seen in other MOOCs. The relevance, or lack thereof, of the course content to learners in healthcare settings outside of the UK may also account for the apparent attrition rate.

Participation levels on the early discussion boards were high, for example, the first discussion board had over 600 comments. Comments were presented in chronological order and as ‘Lead Educators’ we were asked to facilitate these boards. Our identity as ‘Lead Educators’ was clear in our names but there was no facility to have these comments appear at the top of the page so it was difficult to lead or promote any discussion. However, given this was an xMOOC and there was no attempt to select participants or designate sub-groups to facilitate discussions, this may just reflect the open nature of MOOCs.

Although the comments were overwhelmingly positive about the course content and the suggested skills and techniques that could be used by healthcare professionals, we cannot conclude that participation in this course has led to a measurable improvement in the consultation skills of healthcare professionals in order to address the issue of non-adherence to medicines. There was also no facility to identify weaker learners or to encourage re-attendance by those who had dropped out. Therefore as an academic lead it would be reassuring if the opportunity to support individual learners could be made possible in a MOOC learning environment.

This however is perhaps counterintuitive to the ‘massive’ nature of MOOCs and demonstrates precisely that the same measures of success as seen from the learner’s and educator’s
perspective must be tailored to be specific to the MOOC landscape, especially as we move into the post-MOOC era. It cannot be assumed that these OCs or online courses have anything in common other than internet access as a pre-requisite.

**Top tips for potential MOOC academic leads**

- Exploit the functionality of the online platform: adapt learning material and exercises accordingly so you can improve the student experience through responsiveness and flexibility. This may include immediate tailored feedback from quizzes to help students identify gaps in their learning or making it easier for students to navigate back to a particular section they want to cover again.
- As the MOOC is open, there is no way of knowing the specific learning needs of your MOOC students. Explore whether material from videos can also be transcribed into text, or whether students can change the pace at which the material is being delivered, and produce different ways in which the material can be accessed and understood.
- Ensure that the entire MOOC team understand the metrics by which the MOOC will be judged: is it the number of students who register for the course? The number of students who complete the course? The activity level of students during the course? Student rated satisfaction upon completion? The number of students who go onto register for fee-based courses? Know from the outset what a ‘win’ will be for you and your MOOC team.

**Bibliography**


Seven Practitioners’ Tips for Teaching in the Context of Diversity

1. Use diversity to your advantage
Different views and perspectives can open up discussions, challenge conventional views and bring fresh insights to debates. Spend a little time thinking about how you could capitalize on the diversity in your classroom to have dynamic and interesting discussions.

Also, no matter how ‘diverse’ your class may be, mix students frequently with others so that they are not always engaging with the same group of peers.

2. Address and challenge stereotyping openly in the classroom
Students and teachers can bring certain assumptions to the classroom. Don’t assume a student shares a particular point of view or background. For example, men might be rather interested in feminist perspectives and non-White students may be British or overseas just as your Caucasian students are.

It can be useful to talk openly about assumptions. This can also help your students to be more critical.

3. Find out what interests your students
Students will find your class more interesting if they can see the relevance of the topic to the current world they live in. Diversity of experiences can be a strength for you to draw on.

4. Use a ‘universal design’ approach to your teaching materials
A good range of alternative teaching materials, such as interactive online modules, videos and printable online guides are great for meeting different learning needs. Enlarged fonts are helpful for partially sighted students, and coloured backgrounds are particularly helpful for students with dyslexia – but all students might benefit from material in this format.

Lecture recordings and presentations can be posted online. Again, all students might find this useful, but particularly distance learners will benefit. Diversify classroom activities and assessments. For ideas, take a look at the universal design website at: www.udlcenter.org

Singling students out for special attention can cause discomfort or embarrassment.
5. **Use a ‘universal design’ approach for your classroom activities**

Include a range of activities to suit different learning styles. These could be anything from peer support through group work, an e-learning task, a printed work sheet, live audience participation, quizzes, and self-directed learning.

During breaks and task time, make it clear that students can ask you questions individually if they choose.

6. **Avoid jargon and explain unfamiliar terms**

Do ask students whether they have knowledge of something before you assume everyone knows something. Provide a glossary of new terms. Find alternative terms and explanations e.g., “a journal is like a magazine”. Explain clearly what you want students to learn in a session or what you want them to do in an exercise.

Include instructions for classroom tasks on a slide or a handout. Encourage group work for classroom activities. Reassure students that they can master new material.

7. **Raise awareness of further support**

You can make all your students aware of additional support available such as personal tutors, library support and the disability office. If you are unsure about anything yourself, you can also draw on these resources to find out more about how to support your students.
Higher Education Research Network Journal

Teaching in the context of diversity: Reflections and tips from educators at King’s College London

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