

'It makes me feel like I don't belong here because I'm clearly not giving them what they want...': non-traditional students' engagement with and responses to assignment feedback

Dr Tina Byrom

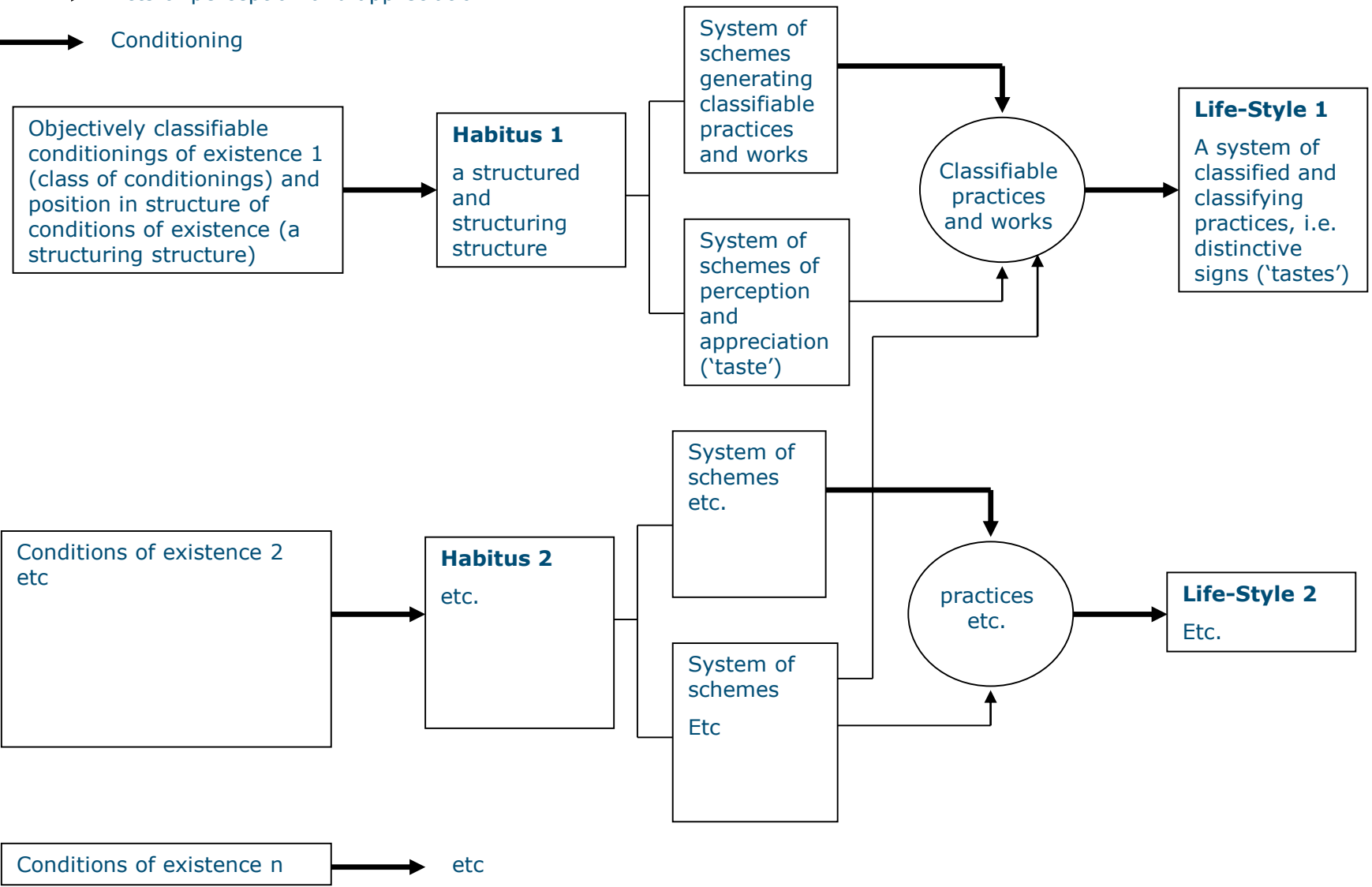
Problem 1

Examining the Field: The Issue of Fit

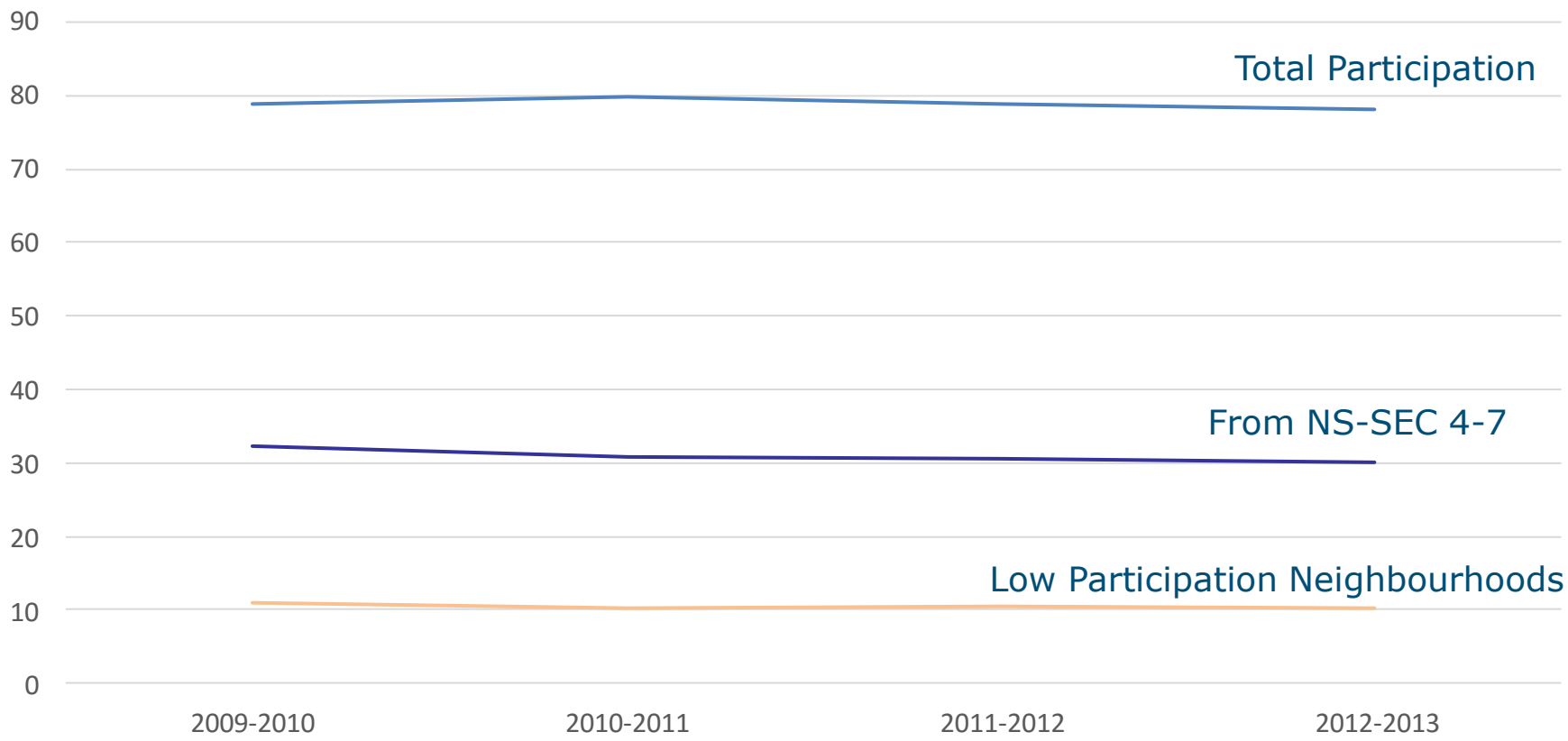
Distinction: is it a matter of taste?

→ Acts of perception and appreciation

→ Conditioning



Young Participation Rates in HE



Choosing a 'Top' University

University	Percentage From NS-SEC 4-7			Percentage From Low Participation Neighbourhoods		
	09-10	12-13	13-14	09-10	12-13	13-14
Cambridge	10.4	11.7	10.8	3.1	3.6	3.6
Oxford	11.3	9.6	10.6	2.7	3.2	2.1
LSE	20.7	20	17.9	4.7	3.4	4.2
St Andrews	13.7	13.1	14.9	ND	ND	ND
Durham	12.8	12.5	14.2	4.7	5.1	4.5
Imperial	17.8	18.4	16.3	3.9	4.2	3.3
Warwick	18.8	19.5	18.8	4.3	5	5.1
Bath	17.2	16.8	17.3	4.3	5.2	5
University College London	17.5	20.2	18.9	3.8	3.5	4.5
Exeter	15.5	15.8	16.3	3.8	4.7	4.1

Data taken from: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/pis/urg>

What About the 'Others'?

University	Percentage From NS-SEC 4-7			Percentage From Low Participation Neighbourhoods		
	09-10	12-13	13-14	09-10	12-13	13-14
University 1	32	32.3	34.1	12.2	12.8	12.7
University 2	33	39.8	38.7	17.4	17.2	18
University 3	37.3	44.2	37.1	19.5	19.5	20.5
Bolton	45.8	48.7	53.5	23.7	22.4	23.7
West London	ND	42.2	47.5	ND	8.3	8.7
Anglia Ruskin	38.6	39.6	38.7	15.3	13.3	13.8
Buckinghamshire New	36.6	40.9	42	9.6	10.3	10.5
London Metropolitan	44.9	51.2	53.2	9.1	6	8
London South Bank	39.8	47.5	51	9.8	7.4	7.7
Bedfordshire	43.2	45.7	50.8	12.4	10.4	10.9

Data taken from: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/pis/urg>

Being a Fish Out of Water

...when habitus encounters a field with which it is not familiar, the resulting disjunctures can generate not only change and transformation, but also disquiet, ambivalence, insecurity and uncertainty.

(Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009: 1105)

Problem 2

Problematic Discourses

Messages About and From the Field

Global Employability University Ranking 2014 results: Cambridge replaces Oxford at the top

8 December 2014 | By [Chris Parr \(URL=chris-parr/1185.bio\)](#)

Top 100 universities for employability revealed



University of Cambridge tops 'Table of Tables' for fourth year

9 October 2014 | By [Chris Parr \(URL=chris-parr/1185.bio\)](#)

The combined results of this year's three main UK university league tables are in



#MyNSS: how would you change the National Student Survey?

16 October 2014 | By [Chris Parr \(URL=chris-parr/1185.bio\)](#)

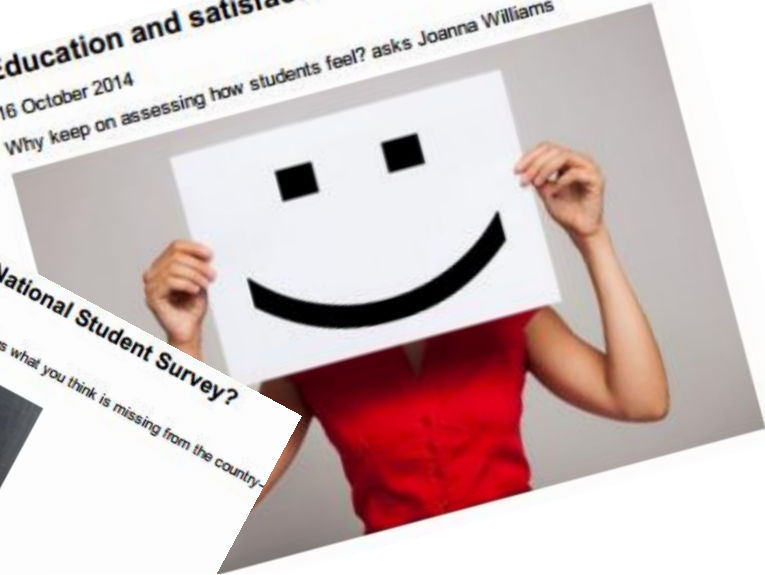
Ahead of the annual Battle of Ideas Festival, we asked you to tell us what you think is missing from the country-wide canvassing of university student views



Education and satisfaction are antithetical

16 October 2014

Why keep on assessing how students feel? asks Joanna Williams



League Tables

Our independent UK University League Tables and Rankings 2015, by university and subject.

University League Tables

Who tops the tables for 2015

1. [Cambridge](#)
2. [Oxford](#)
3. [London School of Economics](#)
4. [St Andrews](#)
5. [Durham](#)
6. [Imperial College London](#)
7. [Warwick](#)
8. [Bath](#)
9. [University College London](#)
10. [Exeter](#)

» [See the full league table](#)

Who's Who in the 67 Subject Tables

Who tops the tables by subject and by region in 2015

Subject League Tables

The top universities in 67 subjects

- [Medicine](#)
- [Accounting & Finance](#)
- [Architecture](#)
- [Art & Design](#)
- [Computer Science](#)
- [Biological Sciences](#)

Subject guides (includes league tables):

- [Business & Management Studies](#)
- [Law](#)
- [Economics](#)
- [Psychology](#)

» [All subjects](#)

University Groups

Details of the Research

Questions

- How do non-traditional students conceptualise and interpret their feedback?
- What can students tell us about feedback they find useful or less useful?

Methods

- Semi-structured interviews
- Questionnaires

Findings

Timing of Feedback

I think that feedback should occur regularly throughout the course. When an assignment has been set, it is important to seek assistance and feedback on work so that you have ample time to make adjustments before the hand in or exam.

(Sam: Qualitative Questionnaire)

Timing of Feedback

We need tutorials much earlier because then we get to know what's expected of us. It can help you know where you're at with the work...you know...whether you belong here.

(Sally: Focus Group Interview)

Timing of Feedback

When you get the feedback is really important – it's no use if it can't lead onto the next assignment....we need it earlier and more often.....it's been great in [module title] this year because we spend some time in an IT room and the lecturer goes round each person and checks what we're working on – this helps because it's kind of what we're doing at the time and we're working on the portfolio tasks

(Beccie: Focus Group Interview)

Useful Feedback

I find written feedback the most useful, as I can then refer back to it when necessary. For example, if I come to write an assignment I can look back over the feedback I received previously to assist me in making the relevant changes to improve my grades.

(Jade: Qualitative Questionnaire)

Useful Feedback

I need the time to be able to ask questions and also when I do get feedback I want examples of how to improve my work so...if they, like, comment on, I don't know, something like 'be more critical', I need them to show me what that means with an example

(Ella: Focus Group Interview)

Useful Feedback

I'd like more time to talk with tutors about the feedback that I have been given so that I can ask questions about what has been written...

(Ed: Focus Group Interview)

Feedback as Elimination

I found it embarrassing to go up to tutors and question as I felt that they may be offended by me challenging feedback or that their item was stretched enough without having to provide further support, and this is the reason why I have not asked...

(Lily: Qualitative Questionnaire)

Feedback as Elimination

I don't like it when they just focus on the weaknesses and go overboard on stuff like that – it feels overwhelming when I think there is just so much wrong with my work....it makes me feel like I don't belong here because I'm clearly not giving them what they want...and I just don't know what they want

(Connor: Focus Group Interview)

Feedback as Elimination

I'd like more information on why my work wasn't at a certain level...so, like if it comes out as a 2.2 I need more information on how I can get it to a 2.1..I have the back of the mark sheet but what's the difference between 'good knowledge of...' and 'very good knowledge of...' – I just never know and I don't feel that I can ask because I'd think that the tutors would think that I was stupid and that I shouldn't be here

(Abbie: Focus Group Interview)

Transformation of the Self

Schooling, in particular, can act to provide a general disposition, a turn towards what Bourdieu terms 'a cultured habitus' (1967: 344). This process of educational socialization has proved particularly effective for the working-class students However, ..., the working-class students' turn towards a cultured habitus was not due, in the main part, to the strong support and active mentoring of their teachers. Rather, it was predominantly work on and of the self.

(Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009: 1105)

Conclusion

- Issues of fit pervade students' experiences of higher education
- HE practices influence students' feelings of fit
- Assessment and feedback operates as a powerful tool through which students explore their sense of fit
- Non-traditional students in this study wanted to engage positively with their feedback

Key Literature Informing the Research

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Acknowledgements

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