Embracing diversity in higher education: participation, belonging, institutional change

Neon Summit: 9th May 2018

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- Widening participation – most attention still on access to HE

- But it's not just about getting in …..

In the UK only 1 in 12 students, or 8%, leave HE during their first year of study, but surveys undertaken by What Works? project teams across four institutions found that **between 33% (1/3) and 42% (2/5) of students think about withdrawing from   HE**.

(What Works HEA report 2012 - Building student engagement and belonging in higher education at a time of change

(Some of) the challenges of diversity

- Feeling different – not 'fitting in'
- Economic differences
- Mature students are not all the same
- Competing priorities – e.g. single parents, mature students
- Prior experiences of education/teaching
- Family background in HE - or lack of
- Divide between home and university
- Space and resources

- Typically success in HE is put down to student resilience and adaptation
- A 'culture of belonging' is critical to the success and well-being of students at university (Thomas, 2012)
- This is found in particular in the interactions amongst students, teachers and peers.

Given that the project requires both independent study and group work we found the best way to communicate was via Facebook. I created a Facebook group in which we can post different things we are reading independently and organising meeting times.

…over reading week…I have found myself informally talking about learning and uni work with friends over Snapchat….I have been using the video function to talk to friends about essay questions and the like! Selfies just got classy! Haha

One of my tutors left to do work abroad..she kindly gave me her skype details..this has proved a very useful way of communicating outside of uni and has helped with keeping in contact and making sure I am on track for certain tasks

I regularly Skype my friend studying at a different university to have work/revision sessions…we both do different subjects we try and prepare something to teach each other as a way of revising. We also spend a good part of our conversation talking about life at university etc as she is in her final year she is really good at providing advice and support
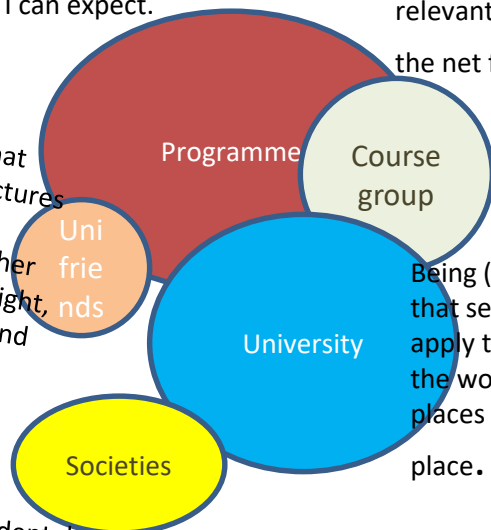
What was even more exciting about the performance was I discovered 4 other girls were Christians like myself! So we have all been heading to church together.

A big essay due..spent past week sending it to a few of my friends in order for them to peer mark it…used google docs to email the essay to friend who then added annotations to it online.

My brother and I both decided to make a Instagram page dedicated to our gym antics….it has proved a massive help in getting connected with others in the fitness world & also helps in my own understanding of the science behind the fitness.

Flat mates

Programme

Course group

Outside friends

Uni friends

University

Societies

Church

Home

work

City

On the plus side I have been working with 2 third year students in preparaing a presentation on health inequalities and what a difference from last year! They actually turn up to our agreed meetings and have done some work! They have been very useful too in giving me information about this year and some of the units and what I can expect.

A lot of my informal learning starts with interesting things I hear on the news. I think you could call me a news junkie! I listen to today,pm, BBC. news 24, occasionally. sky and Al Jazeera! It is an odd day if there is no news item that is relevant to my degree programme. I am always on the net following things up.
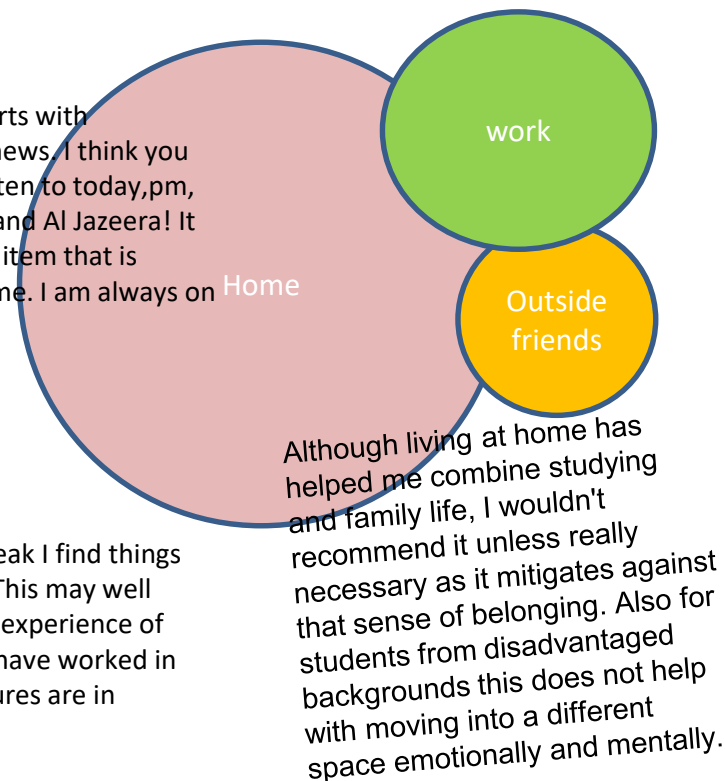
work

Home

Outside friends

I found it very strange that after every interesting lectures all I overheard were conversations about whether people had gone out last night, were going out that night and attending a party at the weekend!

Programme

Course group

Uni friends

University

Although living at home has helped me combine studying and family life, I wouldn't recommend it unless really necessary as it mitigates against that sense of belonging. Also for students from disadvantaged backgrounds this does not help with moving into a different space emotionally and mentally.

Being (just a bit of) a control freak I find things that seem illogical infuriating! This may well apply to students who have an experience of the working world as they will have worked in places where standard procedures are in place.

Societies

I went to the mature student drop in. ….one of the mentors gave a brief overview of Endnote. I knew a little about this from a friend of mine at another university but had been put off by the cost - £75. The other mature student also told me about another free system, Zotero, which is supposedly better than Endnote … Very useful informal learning here! And I will definitely go again whenever I can.

I found the first year quite bewildering really…I am enjoying the learning ..I don't feel a great sense of belonging to the university but I think some of this is 1. Down to the vast age difference between myself and the other students and also my life experiences as well, and also the fact that I don't actually live on site at all so I tend to come into the university, do my lectures or classes and then go home and do the majority of work at home

Digital inequalities, digital practices

- The myth of digital natives - 'Not a generation but an elite' (Brown & Czerniewicz,2010, p.361)
- Technology an essential part of university life
- Replacing technology much more challenging if you are short of money
- DD-lab study - http://digitaldiversitylab.wordpress.com
  - many students making do with old laptops/phones
  - social networks and digital applications help students' support in and out of class, collaborative spaces of their own

Institutional responses

- Inclusion v special actions
- Access4all – EU project looking at inclusion practices and institutional change across EU
- Finnish approach - inclusive practices and policies - make things available for all
- Database of good practices in inclusion and need for institutional strategy on diversity http://access4allproject.eu

New programme models

- Reading English Literature – 6 month p/t – no entry requirements

- http://www.bris.ac.uk/english/study/part-time/rel.html

- Foundation in Arts and Humanities –1 year f/t –max 22.5 hours in employed work – no formal entry requirementshttp://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/study/foundation/

Curriculum and diversity

- Success and retention are also deeply connected to pedagogy, assessment and curriculum

- Connell (2017, p.6) argues that the 21st century university is 'highly unequal' and that "a Eurocentric curriculum prevails almost everywhere"

- "Curriculum is an official selection that structures knowledge in ways that privilege a particular construction of knowledge and the history of knowledge" (Peters, 2017, p.644)

- Why is my curriculum white? movement – challenges the normalisation of whiteness in the curriculum – 'reinforces a superiority complex'
- NUS Youtube video
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dscx4h2l-Pk
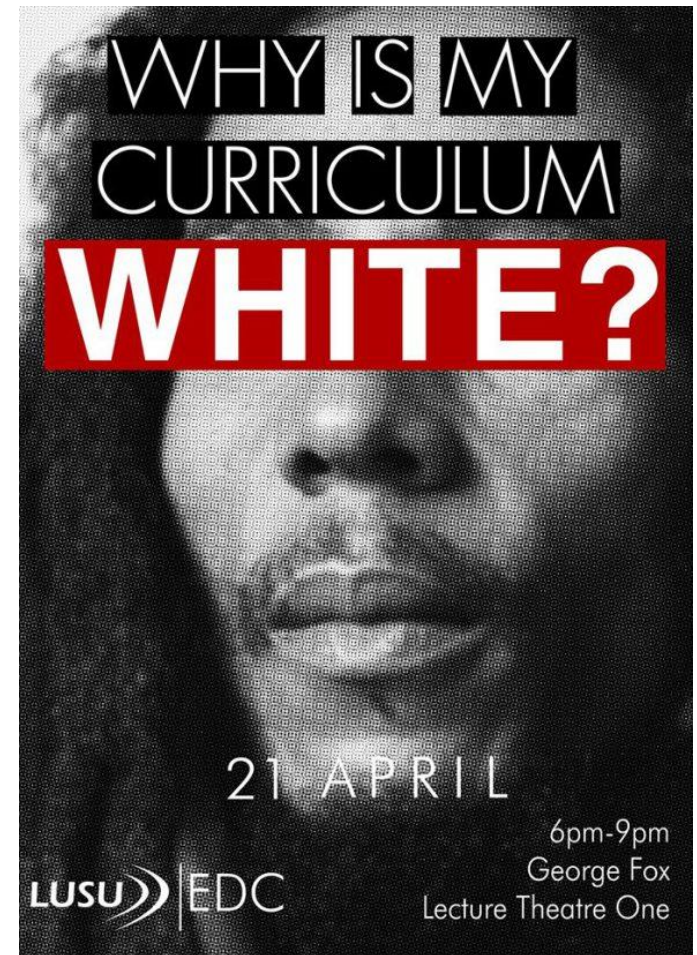
Some questions…

- *'You have to change, the curriculum just stays the same'*
- Can we move beyond resilience and individual adaptation to embracing diversity?
- What more can institutions do to develop cultures of belonging?
- How do we foster student agency?
- What kinds of inclusive curricular and alternative pedagogies are needed to support a more diverse student body?

Thank you!

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Access4all – http://access4allproject.eu
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DD-lab
http://digitaldiversitylab.wordpress.com