Socially inclusive higher education teaching and curriculum in the post-Bradley era

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Professor Marcia Devlin
Deakin University
Australia
Overview

• Australian higher education of the future
• Non-traditional students
• Achievement for all students
• The university student ‘role’
• Understanding tacit expectations
• Socio-cultural capability
• Policy and practice responses
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Australia’s future in higher education

Federal government response to the Bradley Review

Australia’s future in higher education

A target that by 2025, 40% of Australian 25-34 year olds will have a bachelor level or above

+ A target that by 2020, 20% of higher education enrolments at undergraduate level should be from low socio-economic backgrounds

+ Increased connectivity with and articulation from VET and other pathways

= Profound changes for Australian universities
Australian universities of the future

More students.
Australian universities of the future

More ‘non-traditional’ students.
Traditional and non-traditional students

‘Traditional’ students: those who made up the vast majority of the student body in an elite system.

Students who have generally come straight from secondary school to university and in the main, from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, and who tend to study on-campus and full-time.
Traditional and non-traditional students

‘Non-traditional’ students: those who do not fit the definition of ‘traditional’ students.

Mature age students; VET pathways students; students from low socio-economic backgrounds; Indigenous students; rural students; students who are the first in family to attend university; off campus students; part-time students; students with parental responsibilities; and flexible entry students, among others.
Achievement for all students

The federal government have proposed a suite of performance indicators with the central objective of guiding universities toward increased access and increased success, broadly conceived.

In addition to the intrinsic commitment many have to student success, now an additional incentive to focus on student achievement for all students.
Achievement for all students

Theory may be helpful in supporting non-traditional student achievement and in informing policy and practice.
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The student ‘role’

Non-traditional students must not only survive academically at university, they must:
learn to become a university student (Christie et al., 2008)
and
master the university student ‘role’ (Collier and Morgan, 2008)
or risk hindering their achievement.
Mastering the student ‘role’

Mastery requires students to both: understand the expectations of them; and meet those expectations successfully.

The distinction between understanding, and meeting, expectations is critical, particularly in relation to many non-traditional students.
Mastering the student ‘role’

It is likely that many non-traditional students will have a lack of relevant role knowledge and will have particular challenges to overcome in order to achieve at university, particularly in first year.
Mastering the student ‘role’

Greater understanding of the role of a university student would be more likely among traditional students than among non-traditional students:

- who are often the first in their family to attend university; and
- who are likely to have greater demands from other roles, such as parent, employee and others.

(Many non-traditional students are categorised as such precisely because they have other roles (parent, employee, etc)).
Understanding tacit expectations

If a comparison was made between two students who had equivalent understanding of course material, the student who better understood the student role, and in particular, better understood the need to respond to the tacit expectations of the staff member, would perform better.

(Collier and Morgan, 2008, emphasis added).
Socio-cultural capability

Non-traditional students ‘get it wrong’ because they do not understand tacit expectations (Collier and Morgan, 2008)
The assignment we had said, “write about some field experience” and I literally wrote the two page thing out. It said “write” and I took it literally and wrote it out, and then I got a note back that said “see me.” It was in red and everything, and I went and she was like “you were supposed to type this up.” But the instructions were to “write.” I wasn’t sure what she wanted.

(First in family student, Collier and Morgan, 2008, p. 440).
I am taking biology... I do not have experience in writing, and the main thing is that they require writing for research papers, and I’m expecting doing a lot of work trying to figure out how to do that. I did two papers already and... He said, “You have to go back and do it again, this is not scientific writing”... I thought it was scientific because it was from a biology textbook... So it is really hard to see what they want ... they already see it, they already know it, they see what I don’t.

(First in family student, Collier and Morgan, 2008, p. 440).
Questions

Are the students in the previous slides *stupid*?

Are the students in the previous slides *lazy*?

Are the students in the previous slides *unmotivated*?

Are the students in the previous slides experiencing the hidden university curriculum?
Then, it kinda gets a bit worse....
Socio-cultural capability

There are two interrelated ideas relevant to the notion of non-traditional students understanding their role as students, and, separately, mastering that role.

We can distinguish between:

• a student’s academic skills and actual capacity on one hand; and

• their cultural capital and demonstrated capacity on the other.
Meeting unspoken expectations

Many non-traditional students don’t know about them, never mind that they must understand them and then respond appropriately to them.

Whatever a student’s *actual* capacity, their background and cultural capital affects their ability both to understand tacit requirements and to appropriately perform a university student’s role and thereby *demonstrate* their capacity.
Socio-cultural capability

Demonstrated capacity is what is examined and assessed at university.

Collier and Morgan (2008)
Meeting unspoken expectations

This might be termed ‘under-preparedness’.

This ‘lack of preparedness’ and lack of appropriate role knowledge can hinder non-traditional student achievement.

(Under-preparedness does not equal stupidity, laziness or lack of motivation)
Mastering the student ‘role’

Having given them access, Australian universities have a responsibility to facilitate achievement for these students.
Question

“What about standards?”

Translation:

*I think standards will be lowered by having these students at university*

Well, which sort of standards?
Which standards?

1. Provider Registration Requirements (National Protocols)?
2. Qualification Standards (AQF)?
3. Research standards?
4. Teaching standards?
5. University process standards?
6. Outcome standards?
7. Academic standards?
Some easy ways to lower academic standards…

Admit lots of under-prepared students and then:

• Set low expectations
• Demand no rigour
• Ensure sessional staff are untrained and unsupported
• Encourage plagiarism through lazy assessment design
• Make exams easy
• Focus on recall of knowledge/comprehension
Some easy ways to lower academic standards (continued)

- Introduce widespread soft marking
- Don’t moderate
- Ban the articulation of assessment criteria and the use of rubrics and model answers
- Pass everybody regardless of anything
- Don’t monitor assessment practices
- Never review or update assessment policies
- Don’t benchmark
- Repeat
Or...
You could teach and assess the students you have appropriately and to the highest standards possible...
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So what do we do?

Foundation programs
Bridging programs
Orientation programs

Transition programs
Adjunct programs

Infused curriculum
Capstone experiences
So what do we do?

Foundation programs  ) Pre-course
Bridging programs    ) ‘add-ons’
Orientation programs )

Transition programs  ) Concurrent
Adjunct programs     ) ‘add-ons’

Infused curriculum   ) Embedded
Capstone experiences ) initiatives
So what do we do?

Foundation programs  ) Pre-course
Bridging programs  ) ‘add-ons’  GOOD
Orientation programs  )
Transition programs  ) Concurrent
Adjunct programs  ) ‘add-ons’ BETTER
Infused curriculum  ) Embedded
Capstone experiences ) initiatives BEST
So what do we do?

Foundation programs  ) Pre-course

Bridging programs  ) ‘add-ons’ HARD

Orientation programs

Transition programs  ) Concurrent

Adjunct programs  ) ‘add-ons’ HARDER

Infused curriculum  ) Embedded

Capstone experiences ) initiatives HARDEST
So what else do we do?

1. Make expectations explicit and speak in plain language.
2. Integrate the expertise and life experience of students into the curriculum.
3. Help students ‘perform’ as required.
4. Ensure an appropriate institutional policy framework.
1. Make expectations explicit

Assessment briefings and debriefings:
expected standards of work; the provision and explanation of rubrics; discussion of marking criteria to be used for written assignments; advice on avoiding plagiarism and collusion; advice on practical expectations related to assignment preparation and submission; and clear advice about the means through which assistance is provided to students.
Speak in plain language

Lecturers who understand the risks associated with obscuring meaning with language “*put [their academic ideas] into my terms. They don’t … pull out the dictionary every time they need a word. They say it in my language. They make it suit me*” (student comment, Gale, 2002).

Looking up words…
Speak in plain language

At school, teachers put it in their own words and take out all the mumbo jumbo and just put it down so you can understand it … [Whereas] sometimes it’s a bit hard to follow some [lecturers] (student comment, Gale, 2002)

Mumbo jumbo and English literature…
2. Provide an integrated curriculum

Don’t assume students’ multiple roles are a distraction.
2. Provide an integrated curriculum

Assume instead that events and circumstances that occur in the lives and multiple roles of students are potentially rich sites of learning that could be brought into the formal learning environment to some extent.
3. Help students ‘perform’ as required

Normalise, rather than pathologise, students using resources and asking for help.
3. Help students ‘perform’ as required

**Not**: ‘If you’re having trouble...’ or ‘If you’re stuck...’

**Instead**: ‘When it comes time to use the resources available to you to help with assignments, the details of the different forms of help can be found here...’
3. Help students ‘perform’ as required

Use hurdle tasks and nested assessment to provide opportunities to build skills toward a major assignment.

Work proactively and collaboratively with language and learning advisors and career development staff.

Employ successful non-traditional students as peer mentors for new non-traditional students.
4. Ensure appropriate policy

Leadership, structural frameworks, and the creation of a culture that supports the work of individuals and teams who teach is critical to the success of non-traditional students.

Ensure resources – financial and temporal – to facilitate staff development

There must be a sustainable approach, respectful of staff workloads and pressures
Summing up

(Maintain academic standards by):
Accepting that significant change is coming and

Designing the means for making subculture expectations clear to all students;
Providing safe opportunities for them to practice the required skills and normalise such endeavours;
Summing up (cont)

(Maintain academic standards by):
Accepting that significant change is coming and

Preparing a curriculum framework that incorporates students’ existing knowledge;
Considering carefully the professional development and support of staff; and

Being proactive.
Your comments and questions

mdevlin@deakin.edu.au
References


