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Managing diversity: academic's perspective on culture and teaching

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Managing diversity: academic's perspective on culture and teaching

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ABSTRACT

As UK Higher Education institutions continue to accept students from ethnically diverse backgrounds, there is now an onus and an expectation for academics to provide learning environments and experiences that are inclusive, validating and affirming. The aim of this paper is to explore, through the lens of the academic tutor, the pedagogical methods employed towards the implementation of 'cultural branching', which we define as helping ethnically diverse students to build bridges between their pre-existing knowledge and what they are expected to learn. To investigate this in more detail, the researchers interviewed 22 academic tutors across three UK Higher Education Institutions in the North of England. The findings suggest that current curriculum structures and pedagogical approaches favour the dominant non-ethnically diverse learner. Our research proposes that additional emphasis needs to be placed on developing a practical and functional approach which embeds cultural branching via technological platforms.

Introduction

> Although she (the lecturer) tried to explain it to me and she tried her best to explain it, but I still can't get anything. I don't think I can connect to the things that she said, connected with the knowledge that I learned before. (Turner 2006)

Turner (2006) vividly captures and illustrates the challenges UK Higher Education (UKHE) institutions face in creating learning experiences that resonate with students from an ethnic minority background. The research of Turner (2006) and Durden, Dooley, and Truscott (2014) suggests that many academics fail to fully adjust their teaching practices to support and engage students whose background and previous learning experiences may differ from the UKHE norm. This is not an isolated problem concerning only a few universities, but a sector-wide phenomenon with some prominent researchers (Modood 2006; Richardson 2008) arguing that this is an issue which predominately disadvantages ethnically diverse students, impacting on integration (Syed, Azmitia, and Cooper 2011), achievement

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(Richardson 2008) and cultural adjustment (Oberg 2006). Hence, this paper sympathises with the views expressed in the literature that proposes that current educational approaches and strategies place the ethnic minority student at a disadvantage, creating unequal learning experiences and unfair teaching practices (Ngambi 2008; Richardson 2008).

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore academic perceptions of their teaching and learning strategies for students from an ethnically diverse background. We explore this through the mechanism of cultural branching which we define as *helping ethnically diverse students to build bridges between their pre-existing knowledge and what they are expected to learn* (Banks and Banks 1995; Jabbar and Hardaker 2013; Villegas and Lucas 2002). The authors view this as an important point of inquiry due to the numerous scholars (Jabbar and Hardaker 2013; Schmeichel 2011; Tomalin 2007) who contend that current educational support structures, university curriculums, policies and procedures place ethnically diverse students at a disadvantage. To combat this situation, we argue that cultural branching as an approach can help to develop academic perceptions that create fair and equal learning opportunities. This we propose is made up of three key factors; firstly, understanding ethnically diverse students home culture (Gay 2002; Ladson-Billings 1995a, 1995b; Nieto 1999; Young 2010) secondly, understanding the role of culture in the classroom (Gay 2000; Villegas and Lucas 2002) and, thirdly, the notion of a cultural competence (Santoro 2013). In helping to develop and structure this paper, we define ethnically diverse students as *students whose background, ethnicity and experiences differ from the dominant Western culture* (Gay 2002; Jabbar and Hardaker 2013; Nieto 1999).

This paper differentiates cultural branching from other similar approaches in the field, such as scaffolding (Houser 2008; Raelin 2007), cultural competence (Young 2010) and bridging (Leese 2010; Villegas and Lucas 2002) by proposing that current theoretical approaches do not go far enough in discussing the practical elements or challenges involved in embedding cultural history in UKHE. It is clear therefore that the significance of such an investigation within the HE context is taking on ever more prominence as ethnic and racial diversity in HE continues to increase with the upward trend in admissions of greater numbers of international students (Turner 2006). Consequently, conflicts are likely to occur when academics and students originate from different ethnic backgrounds (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, and Curran 2004).

In this paper, the authors begin by briefly reviewing the key literature which contributes to cultural branching. We then discuss how cultural branching has emerged as a concept which can be employed to bridge the gap between home and school culture creating an 'equity pedagogy' (Banks and Banks 1995). Then we define and articulate the key methodological issues, followed by an in-depth discussion of our qualitative results. We close by discussing our contribution to this field of knowledge by primarily proposing the use of intelligent databases, massive open online courses (MOOCs) and information systems to support the practical applications of embedding cultural history in UKHE.

Diversity and business management education

UKHE Business School education has no real history in relation to the employment of cultural branching or multicultural equity (Banks and Banks 1995), with literature (Gatimu 2009; Singh 2011) instead suggesting that UKHE is afflicted with severe structural inequalities. This paper intends to explore these inequalities by investigating UKHE, an education

sector which has been previously overlooked, thus, differentiating this paper from previous research and literature within culturally responsive teaching, which has focused on primary and high school education alongside pre-service teacher training (Durden, Dooley, and Truscott 2014; Gay 2002; Santoro 2013; Villegas and Lucas 2002).

The lack of research in this area and the increasing numbers of ethnically diverse students from an international background make this an important context for inquiry. The intake of international students has become a trend that has accelerated over the last 25 years, with data from UKCISA (2013) suggesting that since 1997 there has been a 100% increase in students from an ethnically diverse background studying in the UK. This increase in student numbers has particularly benefitted UKHE Business Schools who have benefitted from approximately £2 billion annually by providing the most popular university programmes to 40% of the international students who come to study in the UK (CABS 2015).

However, this increase in international student numbers and additional funding has had little or no impact on teaching practices and curriculums which continue to fail to meet the needs of ethnically, culturally and socially diverse classrooms (Sleeter and Grant 2008). Past research for HE Business Schools views diversity as a separate element from the core subjects, where cultural and diverse activities are 'bolted-on' to the curriculum (Tomalin 2007). This is not a new phenomenon, ethnic minority students generally are viewed from the perspective of the deficit model, cultural stereotypes and prejudice (Schmeichel 2011). Ryan (2016) suggests that there exists a wide essentialist misconception amongst Western students and staff that ethnic minority students (mainly Chinese students) always struggle academically, are passive and deferent to authority and lack academic values and critical thinking skills.

Despite such negative perceptions, ethnic minority students from across the world arrive in Western HEIs with a rich educational tradition emanating from different philosophies (Kingston and Forland 2008), for example students from South-East Asia place great emphasis and value on the memorisation of the content as a means to deep understanding, reflection which ensures deep intellectual engagement with learning and active silent participation, strong, harmonious group collaboration, incontestable respect for the teacher, problem-solving strategies based on an attentive analysis of past experiences, mediation of a consensus in an argument and high respect for written text rather than spoken words (Sun and Richardson 2012; Tan 2015). These students use their well-developed strategic skills to achieve good grades in tests and exams.

This has led to the evolution of a 'paradox' within Western academia, which questions the possibility of learners from South-East Asia (especially China) outperforming their Western counterparts in national and international maths and science tests despite the fact that they are perceived as incapable and dissonant with a Western educational system (Tran 2013). Kumaravadivelu (2003) points out that this paradox exists due to Western academics stereotyping students as it 'helps [them] reduce an unmanageable reality to a manageable label'. This perception is based on a lack of intercultural competence and the inability to look beyond major differences between cultural systems (Ryan 2011), concurrently failing to recognise cultural commonalities which could serve as the foundation of the mutual understanding (Ryan 2016).

Thus, to create multiethnic Business School communities, requires institutions to reassess and reevaluate the structural factors in the UKHE education system by challenging Eurocentric perspectives (Gatimu 2009; Giroux 2005), through the recognition that all

knowledge is valuable and students from ethnically diverse backgrounds are capable learners (Villegas and Lucas 2002).

The emergence of cultural branching

The notion of cultural branching encourages educators to explore, implement and asses the use of student home culture and beliefs within the classroom from a theoretical and practical perspective. As an approach it is embedded in the literature field of culturally responsive pedagogy, which teaches through the strength of its students (Gay 2000), and challenges the superficial treatment of diversity which in the view of Giroux (2005) currently prevails in education. Ladson-Billings (1995a) describes culturally responsive teaching as the pedagogy of opposition, made up of three criteria: (1) experience of academic success; (2) developing cultural competence; and (3) critical consciousness. These criteria have been used by many other educational theorists within different contexts. For example, Gay (2002) articulates her five essential elements that have a focus on preparing teachers for pre-service education, while Villegas and Lucas (2002) emphasise (through their six salient characteristics) the need for educators to articulate and embody a vision for teaching.

However, culturally responsive pedagogy cannot occur in a vacuum, it requires careful planning and structured introduction into the classroom (Coulson and Harvey 2013; Houser 2008) through the analysis of UKHE curricula, policies and procedures. An analytical approach such as this acknowledges the legitimacy of the various cultural heritages that are associated with different ethnically diverse groups. While these discussions are a step in the right direction, many educational theorists still articulate the need for embedded cultural awareness and equity in the curriculum and in the policies and procedures of an organisation (Avery and Thomas 2004; Beverly 2003; Gay 1995; Nieto 1999). The challenge in this context is the recognition by UKHE institutions that many academics do not have the necessary skills, confidence or understanding support ethnically diverse students (Black 2010; Sabry and Bruna 2007; Tomalin 2007). Research in the field present a number of reasons for this, which include ignorance (Tomalin 2007), cultural disconnect due to a plethora of white teachers (Black 2010), racism (Zamudio et al. 2009) and low expectations of students (Oikonomidoy 2010).

In confronting negative stereotypes and poor perceptions, this paper proposes cultural branching as an approach which has a significant role to play in bringing to the forefront issues of lecture management (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, and Curran 2004), student achievement (Modood and Shiner 2002) and equity pedagogy development (Banks and Banks 1995). However, before attempts to resolve these issues academics need to first acknowledge the legitimacy of the various cultural heritages that are associated with different ethnic groups and the context in which these heritages are required to integrate. This can be a difficult process, with many academic tutors lacking the cultural competence to understand ethnically diverse students' beliefs, cultures and practices (Tomalin 2007). Academic tutors lacking these crucial skills contribute to the disadvantage that many ethnically diverse students face as they enter UKHE (Richardson 2008).

Methods

The majority of studies within the field of culturally responsive teaching have been case studies, ethnographies, or descriptive studies (Young 2010). Indeed the work of Ladson-Billings

Table 1. Description of the participants.

Name	Academic ethnicity	Role	Experience
Sam	English	Senior lecturer	30
Sarah	English	Senior lecturer	6
Jim	English	Senior lecturer	8
Ayub	Pakistani	Director of education	12
Chung	Chinese	Senior lecturer	20
Paulina	Polish	Lecturer	4
Claire	English	Senior lecturer	7
Rebecca	English	Lecturer	8
Angela	English	Lecturer	4
Liz	English	Senior lecturer	7
Lisa	English	Course leader	15
Julie	South African	Course leader	7
Georgina	English	Senior lecturer	6
Abtin	Iranian	Director of education	25
Chui	Chinese	Lecturer	3
Michael	English	Principal lecturer	7
Bo	Chinese	Lecturer	3
Rodney	English	Principal lecturer	30
John	English	Principal lecturer	35
Amber	English	Senior lecturer	4
Andrew	English	Lecturer	27
Emma	English	Course leader	9

(1995a, 1995b) is based on her work studying eight successful teachers, whilst Villegas and Lucas (2002) derive their work from their reading of a large body of empirical and conceptual literature. The work of Putney and Broughton (2011) stems from one teacher's fifth-grade classroom over four years, and the work of Gay (2000) outlines her research findings, theoretical claims and practical experiences in relation to K-12 students.

This research builds on these previous studies and differentiates itself by focusing on a UKHE Business School context, with a sample of 22 academics across 3 different (post-1992) universities in the North of England. Post-1992 universities refer to polytechnics and central institutions which were granted university status in the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. Traditionally, these post-1992 institutions are not research-orientated and maintain a focus on the development of student's vocational skills. From these institutions, the researchers interviewed Lecturers, Senior Lecturers and Principal Lecturers who had a minimum of three years experience of teaching within UKHE. The demographic breakdown of the academic population interviewed was 66% white, 5% British Pakistani, 5% Polish, 14% Chinese, 5% South African and 5% Iranian. The interviews were conducted by the lead researcher who was a British Pakistani male born and raised in the UK. The presence of the researcher who has an understanding of the dominant Western educational system and culture, alongside his personal ethnic minority background allowed participants to feel safe and secure, creating an environment where they can discuss their previously unspoken beliefs about student ethnicity, issues of race and learning difference openly. Table 1 outlines the sample in more detail; the names of the respondents have been changed to protect anonymity.

Data collection

In order to collect the necessary data, we employed data collection strategies which are common in this area of enquiry, mainly interviews, observations and journaling (Young

Table 2. Interview questions.

Questions
Question 1: In your own experience can you describe some of your experiences about cultural and ethnic diversity in Higher Education Business Schools?
Question 2: What does ethnicity and diversity mean to you?
Question 3: How do you feel that students from an ethnically diverse background adapt to life as a student in a British Business School?
Question 4: What do you feel these students should be able to accomplish and achieve?
Question 5: Do you feel that your teaching methods are appropriate to a diverse student body?
Question 6: Do you feel that your experiences and status make you a good role model for your students?
Question 7: In your experience, what is the best way to engage students from a diverse background?
Question 8: How do you feel this institution supports you in teaching an ethnically diverse student body?

2010). In-depth interviews were conducted with our participants and lasted between 50 to 90 min, with informed consent obtained at the start of each interview. The questions asked of the participants are outlined in Table 2. In addition to the in-depth interviews, the researchers employed the tool Memoing (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 69), which allows for the collection of non-standard data such as gestures, facial expressions and other non-verbal forms of expression (Creswell 2012; Groenewald 2004).

The final tool was the maintenance of a reflexive diary. In order to be objective and to create a certain level of validation within the research, the employment of a reflexive diary minimises any influence on the participant (Finlay 2002, p. 536). The diary opens the researchers account up to public scrutiny, and while it may not provide definitive proof, it does allow the researchers' thought processes to be probed, which itself demonstrates a level of integrity (Ahern 1999; Finlay 2002; King and Horrocks 2010). In total, this research collected and transcribed in excess of 45 h of audio footage, alongside 22 memoing documents and a reflexive diary, which spans over 50 pages.

Data analysis

All of the collected data were transcribed and organised through the use of template analysis (Brooks et al. 2015; King 2004, 2012). This was undertaken independently by all the researchers, with weekly meetings conducted to compare notes. While template analysis is a relatively new approach, it is nonetheless regarded in qualitative circles as providing similar analytical rigour and findings to IPA (Langdridge 2007). Template analysis also lends itself well to usage across multiple methodological and epistemological approaches, especially in an interpretative approach such as the one adopted in this research (Crabtree and Miller 1992; King 2004, 2012).

After transcription, the next stage of the analytical process was to implement a coding structure, and to achieve this, *a priori* code template was generated through a review of the literature, primarily the ideas of knowledge construction (Nieto 1999), the need for self-reflection (Gay and Kirkland 2003) and the importance of equity pedagogy (Banks and Banks 1995). The researchers then mapped the transcribed interviews, reflexive notes and memos onto the priori code set, which was then used to inform template A (process demonstrated in Table 3). The *a priori template* is a crucial aspect of the template analysis approach, with King (2004) encouraging the researcher to conceptualise the form of the template and identify how extensive this should be early on. This is supported by other researchers

Table 3. Coding templates identifying 'cultural branching'.

Priori template	Template A	Template B	Template C
Knowledge construction (Nieto 1999)	Scaffolding	Scaffolding	**Scaffolding***
Self-reflection and tangible meaning (Gay and Kirkland 2003)	Reflection on teaching methods and skills	Reflection on teaching methods and skills	**Reflection on teaching methods and skills***
Modify instruction and curriculum for equity pedagogy (Banks and Banks 1995)	Equity pedagogy Cultural competence	Equity pedagogy Cultural competence Building trust Integration • Induction • Racism • Engineered groups	**Equity pedagogy* Cultural competence* Building trust* Integration*** • Induction • Racism • Engineered groups • Students living local • Resolving issues with home students
		Dumbing down	**Capability***

(Crabtree and DiCicco-Bloom 2006; King 2012; Langdridge 2007) who discuss the use of pre-defined *a priori* codes in helping to structure and analyse the collected interview data.

At this stage, the researchers cross-referenced the data with each other, and through the use of a parallel coding, created template B (King 2012). The utilisation of parallel coding (Axial Coding) within template analysis allowed for segments of text to be classified within two or more different codes at the same level, allowing for the emergence of relationships across clusters and themes (Crabtree and Miller 1999; King 2004). For further validity and consistency between researchers, the data were reviewed for a third time, notes were compared, parallel coding was undertaken and a template C was developed. In Table 3, the *italicised* and underlined text highlights new codes that were added to the templates during each step of the process of analysis.

Template A highlights structured learning opportunities termed as 'scaffolding' and academics 'reflection on their teaching', creating learning opportunities which acknowledge student background, underpinned by equity pedagogy. We also attach an additional higher level code which recognises 'cultural competence', while engaging with ethnically diverse students.

Template B identifies additional depth and context through the cross-referencing of data, which fits into more than one sub-heading. This validation identified an additional three higher level codes: 'building trust'; 'integration'; and the phenomena of 'dumbing down'. The sub-headings under 'integration' were identified by the researches as challenges which were highlighted by the interview sample.

In Template C, the researchers identified additional context for the higher level code 'integration'. The only change, which warrants discussion, is the renaming of the higher level code 'dumbing down' in this step. After considerable review and deliberation between the researchers, this was renamed to 'capability'. Primarily, the researchers concluded that 'dumbing down' is an inappropriate term, and is heavily laden with prejudice and misunderstanding. Template C is an output of the previous three steps and highlights the seven main higher level codes, which are indicated with an asterisk (*). Through this process, three themes emerged as illustrated in Figure 1.
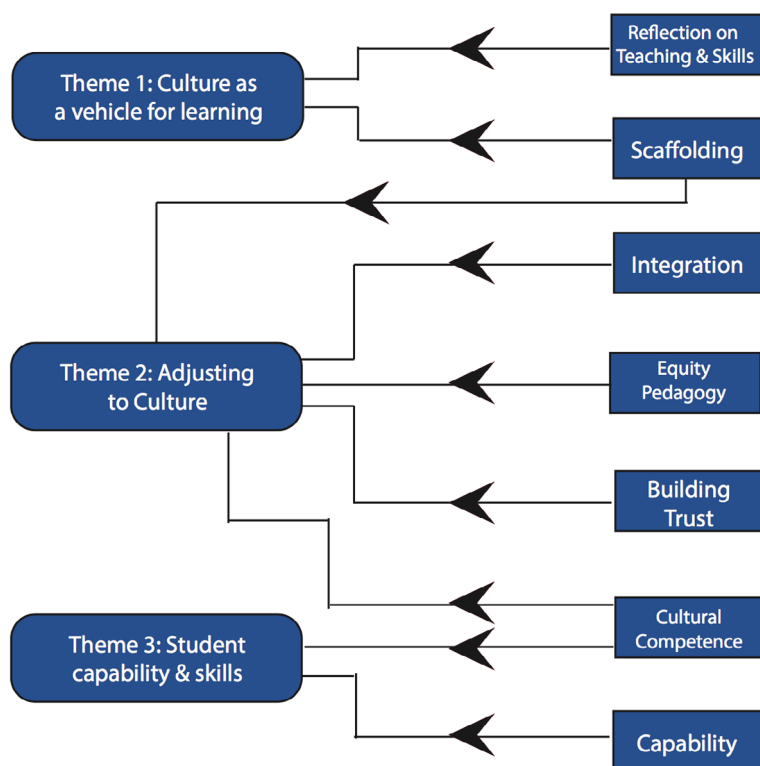
Figure 1. Key themes in the employment of cultural bridging.

Findings

The three themes suggest that there is substantial work to be done in providing an environment within UKHE which encourages academics and institutions to develop pedagogical methods which employ cultural branching. Our findings now discuss these themes in more depth.

Theme 1: Culture as a vehicle for learning

In the first theme, the paper investigates the idea that culture is an asset which can be utilised in the classroom. Research (Jabbar and Hardaker 2013; Lumby and Foskett 2015) suggests that culture has the potential to create a student–teacher relationship which is fluid, built on high expectations and innovative classroom experiences. In this context, Piaget (1977) proposes that the onus is on the academic to create these experiences and to support ethnic minority integration into the classroom, helping and supporting them through the process of attaching meaning to new inputs and experiences based on their prior knowledge and beliefs.

Developing these new experiences and creating learning opportunities was for many academics in this study a challenge. It was clear that the academics interviewed struggled to understand the background of their students and undertook what Banks (2008) and

Black (2010) describe as a contributions approach, which has a focus on specific cultural elements while leaving the core curriculum unchanged:

> On Friday teaching we need to accommodate for people wanting to go for prayer time. (Julie)

> I tried to learn some Urdu, not the serious stuff, but little bits of stuff and they kind of respond to that, so I know when they are swearing and I can give as good as I get. (Chung)

While for some academics the contributions approached is a good mechanism for ice breaking, Banks (2008) argues that this approach is very popular with white academics who are looking for a quick fix due to a lack of multicultural material. We found that this statement is not strictly true, out of the seven ethnically diverse academic respondents, we found that four, on occasion reverted to a contributions approach.

Other academics in attempting to utilise culture in the classroom attempted to involve ethnically diverse students in the classroom, in an effort to develop engagement, understanding and a sense of community:

> What I try to do is make every student present themselves I ask them to say something interesting or funny about their culture, about their country so the others are much more relaxed so just to break all the stereotypes. (Paulina)

Paulina tries to help ethnically diverse students to embrace their backgrounds through dialogue, John takes a slightly different tact and takes a more academic intensive approach in trying to get ethnically diverse students to engage with UKHE:

> For any materials that I write, I try to avoid longer sentences with multiple clauses, I try to keep to shorter sentences and keep away from English which is going to be difficult to understand because of the particular choice of words of idioms or whatever. (John)

However, both Paulina and John need to take a balanced approach to these strategies, in the view of Beekes (2006) these attempts can cause more harm than good with Chinese students in particular wary of answering questions or talking about themselves in fear of 'losing face'.

In practice, embedding culture as a vehicle for learning in UKHE teaching is elusive, and requires institutions to support academics through this process. As highlighted in this theme, there are many nuances with culture and there needs to be a careful balance between the academic and institutional approach.

Theme 2: Adjusting to culture

Housee (2011) is of the view that university settings are not neutral environments, and while they can be supportive and inclusive they can also be dismissive, destructive and alienating. This lack of neutrality can create problems for students of ethnic diversity, placing barriers in the adjustment to differing cultures and environments and creating problems to what Yamazaki and Kayes (2004) refer to as 'cross-cultural adaptation'.

This research found little evidence of 'cross-cultural adaptation', but investigations uncovered the academic perception that many ethnically diverse students struggle to integrate into wider university society:

> Students aren't prepared to look out of their own culture only looking at things they see as culturally relevant to themselves. (Sarah)

> A lot of them do live in groups with their own backgrounds, which lead you to question to what extent they are integrating. (Rodney)

These academic perceptions support the view of Mintzberg and Gosling (2002) who found that many students, when moving to a new culture prefer to stay in their niche groups for fear of engaging with the wider student society. Academics found this to be a major problem, which students need to overcome quickly:

> You've got to get used to your environment, get over quirky things like you can cross the road at Pelican Crossings, and the shops and money are different. (Claire)

> International students are not actually prepared to spend time to get to know a lot of students from different backgrounds and things. (Sarah)

While no specific remedial strategies were identified, this is an issue which places significant stress on the students, leading many ethnically diverse students to withdraw into their own support groups, where they feel comfortable, Oberg (2006) labels this phenomenon as 'culture shock'. Oberg argues that this is just one of the few shocks which international students encounter in UKHE, other shocks include; education shock and learning shock which predominantly materialises in the early stages of a course placing significant pressure on student adjustment:

> International students always get a shock from the culture and the different education system. (Bo)

> If something is not timetabled, they don't do it, any class on cultural awareness or improving English they won't do, they don't see it as part of their core studies. (Rodney)

There is an implication by both Bo and Rodney that the change in environment and surroundings places ethnic minority students at a disadvantage and hence, many may not fully integrate into UKHE. This is classic culture shock behaviour and in conditions such as these students revert to their cliques and tend not engage with the wider student population.

The issues of integration are also felt outside of the classroom, literature (Gu and Maley 2008) suggests that many students struggle to adapt to local customs, traditions and societal norms:

> There is a problem with the British attitude towards alcohol and socialising. International students are made to feel less welcome or less part of the cohort, because they don't do that sort of socialising to the same extent as the British students. (Emma)

Emma makes a very valid point and some of the work in this paper suggests that a lack of socialising at the start of the course between ethnicities can become ingrained throughout the rest of their study:

> Chinese students and smaller ethnicities find it extremely difficult to interact with other students at the beginning of the course. (Paulina)

The sentiments of both Emma and Paulina make it quite clear that the first few months in a new culture are essential to student integration, experience and well-being. The aim of this theme brings to the fore academic perceptions on student adjustment to UKHE, which is clear that ethnically diverse students, especially international students struggle to adapt to new regulations, learning approaches, policies and procedures and display the behavioural traits defined by Oberg (2006) as culture shock. Through this theme this paper highlights the notion that cultural branching can be utilised to minimise some of the shocks discussed within this theme, removing some significant early obstacles in student adjustment to UKHE.

Theme 3: Student capability and skills

In the third theme, this paper investigates the perceptions academic staff have towards the capability and skills of their international students. Current literature (Baldwin, Buchanan, and Rudisill 2007; Banks and Banks 1995; Tomalin 2007) in the field paints an unfavourable picture arguing that in many cases there is a perception that ethnically diverse students have low capability, poor skills, lack intelligence, are difficult to work with, and apt to cause discipline problems (Baldwin, Buchanan, and Rudisill 2007). In addition to these perceptions, Habu (2000) found that ethnically diverse students complain they are not taken seriously and are viewed as a source of income as opposed to learners. While not representative of the whole sample, Sam did question the mentality of his ethnically diverse students:

> There is a significant minority of female Pakistani students who seem quite childish; some of them tend to behave almost like thirteen or fourteen year olds. (Sam)

This view of Sam is not a new phenomenon, but caution must be exercised in case this view is construed as a mechanism for academics absolving themselves of any responsibility towards the achievement and attainment of their ethnic minority students. Sam's view was also supported by other academics:

> We have had issues with certain groups of students lacking focus and attention constantly talking and using mobile phones and they are in the main ethnic minority students. (Ayub)

> Most of the Asian guys have no motivation to learn. They say I only want to get a degree so I can marry a better girl. (Chung)

The view that ethnic minority students are 'childish', 'unmotivated' or are lacking in 'focus', overlooks the real issues and challenges these students face, while placing blame for lack of attainment on the student. As mentioned earlier, in many cases academics struggle to engage ethnically diverse students in the classroom, this creates a disconnect between student's previous knowledge and what they are supposed to learn.

This lack of engagement and critical thinking at an early stage hampers student ability to engage in the wider course, Young (2010) is of the view that too many academics attempt to shelter their ethnically diverse students from the more demanding aspects of the course and thus students struggle to build the necessary cultural capital required to participate. Howard (2003) discusses cultural capital as an essential element of a student's skillset comprising of social practices, ideologies, language and behaviour. In this context, many students who are not in-tune with the native English language will be at a disadvantage; conferring considerable privilege to students whose primary language is English. The lack of English was a big issue for many of our respondents:

> I think if they were able to speak the language I wouldn't have the issues that I'm having. (Ayub)

> So she's translating and she's gone to the thesaurus and replaced words, and what she meant by occupation, she's put something else and you think, no it doesn't mean that. When I'm here I should speak English, when I'm somewhere else then I should speak my own language. (Abtin)

This lack of language places many immense pressure on academics to support their students' transition as learners, when asked how this transition was accomplished, there was an unguarded admission of 'dumbing down':

> When I started I did a lot of difficult things, by the time I finished I had to make it easier. (Abtin)

> Sometimes there is a subconscious tendency to dumb it down for them to help them. (Andrew)

> It seems like in trying to get rid of the bad practice they are 'dumbing' down the good practice, which doesn't always go down well. (Rodney)

The lack of language and minimal trust in student ability and motivation suggests that many academics struggle to develop culturally congruent material. Our findings suggest academics deliver an educational experience based on 'academic convenience', not student need, this we put down to a lack of training and poor institutional support. The aim of this theme is to highlight the need for cultural branching to rebuild relationships between students and academics, combatting environmental conditions where beliefs and views that could be culturally and educationally harmful take root.

Discussion

The aim of this paper is to explore, through the lens of the academic tutor, their teaching and learning strategies for students from an ethnically diverse background. The identified research themes in this paper suggest very little is undertaken by academics and institutions towards the implementation of curriculum, learning approaches and policies & procedures to support ethnically diverse students in the UKHE classroom. This places ethnically diverse students at a distinct disadvantage compared to their non-ethnically diverse counterparts, adding additional barriers while attempting to adjust to new concepts, conventions, curriculums and ideas. Our research contribution proposes that for the practical and theoretical implementation of cultural branching, UKHE should respond to these challenges through the means of technological innovation.

What is the net impact?

This research suggests that changes need to be made in how UKHE develop pedagogy, create and implement policies & procedures, and how they support students of diversity. Different educational theorists have proposed multiple solutions, Nieto (1999, 2000) advocates the dismantling of existing school structures and the radical reformation of current curricula, policies and procedures, while Gay (2002) proposes an evolutionary approach and puts forward the need for the gradual reconfiguration of classroom pedagogy and pre-service teacher training.

The proposition of these diverse approaches and current academic perceptions highlight the uncertainty and complexity surrounding differing ethnic groups and experiences, placing the spotlight on the inadequacy of a traditional Western curriculum within a multicultural classroom (Freire 2000; Putney and Broughton 2011; Taylor and Whittaker 2003). This research finds that this confusion has wide ranging impacts and is a particular challenge for the three key stakeholders as part of the teaching and learning process, namely academics, students and the institution. This echoes the view of Houser (2008) who argues that cultural integration can be an 'ocean of cultural confusion'.

A large amount of this academic confusion stems from a lack of cultural understanding and a fear of political incorrectness (Tomalin 2007) which is underpinned by a lack of awareness on multicultural pedagogy implementation (Black 2010). For students, the confusion stems from the lack of support afforded to them due to the negative effects of culture

shock (Oberg 2006) which impacts on how students socially and academically integrate into UKHE. Finally, it is clear that the continued admission of ethnically diverse students is an operational and strategic decision underpinned by multiple and complex variables. There are genuine dilemmas for those with decision-making responsibilities, who need to safeguard the student experience and long-term financial viability.

In assessing the impact of this research, we found pockets of good practice in the implementation of cultural branching. Too often these pockets of good practice were isolated examples and this is too the detriment of the students, the academics and the organisation in which they work. The implementation of cultural branching cannot occur in isolated classrooms or in small anecdotal parts of a curriculum, it requires a commitment by organisations and academics to view teaching and learning for ethnically diverse students as holistic, inclusive and integrated.

The use of MOOCS to evolve from isolated to holistic pedagogy

One way to achieve this commitment and to create a holistic approach is the use of MOOCs. Opening up the classroom to the WWW gives ethnically diverse students a chance to communicate and engage in an environment of connectivity. HE and technology are uniquely placed to create and take advantage of these online environments, where ethnically diverse students can build their own knowledge representations and meanings (Traxler 2009), connecting students with their home culture across a variety of channels and modes (Stein 2000). This is a relatively efficient and practical way to create an international curriculum supported by institutions and taught by academics. This would go we argue some way in acknowledging the unique needs of ethnically diverse students (Beverly 2003; Rynes and Quinn Trank 1999), and acknowledge an increased awareness of the challenges of integration and adjustment in a technologically international environment. However, any such technological or pedagogical concepts need to be supported by multicultural policies and procedures and culturally relevant content (Jabbar and Hardaker 2013).

Using databases to develop theory based on good practice

In proposing our second contribution, there is an emphasis on practical, functional pedagogy which engages students as co-producers in the construction of knowledge, this is viewed by Raelin (2007) as good and commendable practice. This is made possible and practical through the use of intelligent database systems which support technology such as electronic Personal Development Portfolios (ePDP) to asses student aptitudes but to also help academics reflect on their own practice (Traxler 2009). The use of ePDP systems can support academic staff training and guide these educators through the process of contemplation and reflection. This intelligent database systems approach, collects data on academic views, perceptions, habits and behaviours with a focus on both designing for and understanding learner participation and engagement.

The use of database systems such as ePDP within this context helps institutions to develop training around the concept of 'scaffolding', a mechanism proposed by Gay (2002) to expand student intellectual horizons. One popular method of scaffolding is the use of self-reflection to construct tangible meaning, Sabry and Bruna (2007) describe this as an appropriate approach to help ethnically diverse students and academics make connections between

what they know and what they do not know. Ladson-Billings (1995b) links self-reflection to heritage and culture, and views this as a positive construct that can lead to achievement and identity, helping to foster a sense of community and responsibility within the classroom. The use of ePDP within this context is ideal in creating a relationship of co-production, creating a conducive environment of learning and self-respect, where theory informs practice and practice informs theory.

Reconfigure HE curriculum policies and procedures

Classroom pedagogy, is invariably framed and governed by curriculum strategies, policies and procedures (Hardy and Tolhurst 2014), which we argue currently predominately cater exclusively for Western students. This view is supported by Sleeter (2001) who describes current approaches to strategy and policies and procedures as 'additions' to the core curriculum, and not fundamental changes which can make a difference. Based on these views, it is a fair summary to propose that rather than help ethnically diverse student's current curriculums are an obstacle in the implementation and employment of cultural branching approaches. Any such reconfiguration will build on our current proposals which advocate the implementation of an inclusive equity-based curriculum through the use of MOOCs to help develop theory and practice.

This reconfiguration of current practice aims to encourage institutions to look outside of traditional methods of instruction and embed curriculum approaches which are conducive to learning for students of ethnic diversity across multiple technological channels

However, any such reconfiguration and embedding of new ideas needs to consider the viewpoints of Gay (2002) who again reiterates that ethnically diverse students are capable learners, and Villegas and Lucas (2002) who contend that educators as individuals need to take responsibility and be capable of academic change, especially as we propose in relation to employing cultural branching strategies.

Professional development

The growing use of digital technologies has created learning opportunities in open and inclusive environments (Traxler 2009). As discussed earlier in this paper MOOCs offer institutions the ability to offer programmes on a global, inclusive scale while ePDP allows institutions to take a digital approach in allowing students to reflect on their aspirations, learning, performance and achievement (Traxler 2009). In order for academics to support this digital approach to teaching and learning there is a need for continuous professional development which investigates in the view of Hardy and Tolhurst (2014) the 'directionality of the relationship between beliefs and learning and the impact the environment may have on both'. This research does not suggest that the altering of the learning environment may have an impact on academic perceptions, but there should be an active discussion which explores academic perceptions and their impact on teaching and learning.

As part of this process Bhopal and Rhamie (2014) proposes that academics need to reflect on issues of identity and privilege while Picower (2009) asks institutions and individuals to consider how power placement influences learning opportunities for ethnically diverse students. In addition any such reflective process should in the view of Sabry and Bruna (2007) and Durden and Truscott (2013) incorporate materials and curriculums from

multiple cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds. This exposure to cross-cultural materials should be developed alongside an institutional approach which enthuses academics with the responsibility for developing teaching and pedagogy that is responsive to ethnically diverse students. Thus, for these institutions to meet the professional development requirements suggested in this paper there may be a need for a period of institutional 'soul searching' through internal exercises and or official reviews which reflect on heritage and values.

While this paper does not advocate any clear 'gold standard practice' or specific 'service training', what this paper does highlight is that each institution will need to consider its own personalised approach towards cultural branching training. Hence, any such professional development programme should be based on institutional and academic reflection which mirrors the ethos and the vision of the institution.

Limitations and future research

As is the case with most qualitative frameworks, there are some limitations which suggest directions for future research (Margolis and Molinsky 2008). As part of this research, we collected the ethnicities of the respondents alongside years of service in order to develop a balanced sample across ethnicities and academic experiences. However, future research in this area could develop a further dimension which analyses and investigates the role of academic experience, gender and ethnicity and highlight how these variables add an additional layer of complexity when academic tutors attempt to employ cultural branching strategies.

Any such research which considers these extra dimensions needs to consider academic intellectual capital in the production of cohesive teaching and learning strategies (Ryan 2011) alongside what Durden (2008) refers to as an understanding of students cultural capital (Durden 2008). Future work in this area needs to understand cultural capital and the student–academic power relationships which exist both inside and outside of the classroom with researchers (Higbee, Lundell, and Duranczyk 2007) suggesting that current educational approaches to ethnically diverse students replay the dominant power struggles which are prevalent in society. Shaw (2009) makes the case that rather than focus on the 'other' or 'bolt on' strategies both students and staff are in a strong position to contribute to knowledge production within a UKHE environment. However, any such approach would need to consider the power relationship balance so as not to be perceived as a threat (Picower 2009).

Finally, it is important to point out that this area of enquiry is also coming to the fore during a time of great technological change. While in our discussion we touch on some of the aspects of the role of the internet and social media in cultural branching there is still vast potential to create individual personalised cultural branching practices which are innovative and representative, based on Big Data systems. Further investigations should investigate how the representation of multiple channels and modes within this type of cultural branching scenario is conducive to the communicative styles of most ethnically diverse students who are more active, participatory and multi modal (Gay 2002).

Conclusion

This paper recognises the role of the academic tutor as a conduit between the student and the classroom when employing cultural branching strategies. However, it would be unfair to highlight the role of the academic without also questioning the role of the organisation

and how epistemologically current curriculums and assessments are designed in favour of the dominant non-ethnically diverse student. Turner (2006) and Ngambi (2008) both argue that these systematic approaches to learning are designed to fail students from an ethnically diverse background. To overcome these epistemological issues, this paper has proposed an approach where theory informs practice and practice informs theory. This in our contribution we argue is achieved through the use of MOOCs in disseminating and developing an international curriculum, the implementation of ePDP to support academic reflection, content and material scaffolding in the classroom, bespoke training programmes which are academic focused, and the implementation of a holistic curriculum which is based on a reconfiguration of HE curriculum policies and procedures. These approaches minimise the confusion that we identify in our earlier discussion.

The three themes of this study highlight the varying complexities surrounding issues of cultural branching in a dynamic and vibrant HE environment, where normal classroom rules are not as pervasive. The proposed implementation of technological innovation within this context opens up an online space where academic staff can help students make links between their home culture and the classroom.

Disclosure statement

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