



Great expectations: practical actions to overcome psycho-social barriers to attainment

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This session

- Sector differences in student outcomes
- Sector research on how to address these differences
- Focus on psycho-social processes
- Practical actions in our own context(s)

Differences in student outcomes

- Across the sector, black and minority ethnic (BME) students, male students, and students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to attain a good degree than their white, female and non-disadvantaged counterparts (HEFCE, 2013), (Equality Challenge Unit, 2015).
- [Higher Education White Paper: Success as a Knowledge Economy; teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice](#), 16 May

*“We will promote transparency by opening up data held by the sector, informing choice and promoting social mobility, by **putting a duty on institutions to publish application, offer, acceptance and progression rates broken down by gender, ethnicity and disadvantage.**”*
- [Success for All](#) – improving the student experience for all students.

Causes of differences in student outcomes?

"The evidence points to a complex range of differently connected factors" (Singh, 2009, p24)

"No single cause has been found to solely explain why there is a gap" (Richardson, 2013, p11)

- Explanations and strategies have considered:
 - role of institution;
 - role of student; and
 - "the quality of students' learning and in particular their conceptions of learning" (Sanders, 2014, p13)
- Multi-intervention approach.
- What works in one context may not always work in another (Thomas, 2012) (DiSA, 2013).
- Solutions tailored to your own context and resources.

"One intervention type does not fit all students equally" (Eddy and Hogan, 2014, p463)

UK research

Two key reports:

- [Disparities in Student Attainment \(DiSA\) Project](#) (Cousin and Cureton, 2012)
- [Causes of Difference in Student Outcomes](#) (HEFCE, 2015).

Four key themes:

- improving relationships;
- building social and cultural capital;
- curricular, learning, teaching and assessment; and
- **psycho-social processes**

*“little research has specifically focused on the individual psychological factors of ME [minority ethnic] students ... This is probably unsurprising since **locating**, even in part, **the ‘cause’ of ME student underachievement within individuals themselves runs the danger of collapsing explanations for the attainment gap back in to a deficit model** of blaming ME students for their academic ‘failures’ (Stevenson, 2012, p104).*

Psycho-social processes

UK research

- Tendency to 'group think' (Cousin and Cureton, 2012)
- 'Pygmalion effect' – lower expectations borne out in reality (Cousin and Cureton, 2012)

USA research

- Stereotype threat - *"worry that one could be perceived through the lens of a negative intellectual stereotype... can undermine academic performance"* (Yeager and Walton, 2011, p279)
- Belongingness uncertainty – *" the fear, often signalled by one's identity, that one does not belong in a setting where academic ability is prized"* (Spitzer and Aronson, 2015, p4)

"Social identity processes like stereotype threat and belongingness uncertainty create markedly different subjective experiences for students targeted by stereotypes, which in turn can lead to significant differences in performance" (ibid, p4)

UK research and suggested actions

- Importance of individualisation (Cousin and Cureton, 2012)
 - Interlocutor - relationship with staff with high expectations and belief can achieve them.
- Importance of communicating high expectations and challenging low expectations (Open University HEA funded project)
- Lecturer/student expectations differ (Cousin and Cureton, 2012)

UK research and suggested actions

- Help seeking behaviours
 - [Male students: Engagement with academic and pastoral support services](#) different help seeking behaviours (ECU, 2012)
 - Possible selves (Stevenson, 2012), (Stevenson, 2013)
 - Practical steps to achieve goals (Oyserman, 2004)
- Role models and increasing staff diversity
 - Use of student alumni (University of Hertfordshire)
 - Student stories - Edgehill University [University success through BTEC study](#)
 - Caution 'photo opportunity' diversity and active/passive roles in images (Stevenson, 2013)

USA research

Social psychological interventions

- **Stealthy, brief and reinforce message** – so students **actively participate** in intervention.
- Wise feedback
- Help seeking behaviour

- You may also be interested in:
 - Belonging (Walton and Cohen, 2007);
 - Values intervention (Harackiewicz et al, 2014);
 - Social-Psychological Interventions in Education: They're Not Magic (Yeager and Walton, 2011)

Summary of ideas

- Awareness of group think and Pygmalion effect
- Individualisation
- Tutor/student expectations
- Communicating high expectations and challenging low expectations
- Appealing to different help seeking behaviours
- Practical steps to achieving goals
- Role models and potential of student body and alumni
- Using student stories

- What can we take from this research and apply in our own context(s)?
- Is there one thing that you can do differently (however small)?

Where can I find out more about Success for All?

- Contact your Success for All School Lead:
 - Julia Davies (ARES), Adam O'Rourke (ADBE), Christine Hardy (A&D), Lloyd Pettiford (A&H), Belinda Ferguson (ED), Melanie Currie (NBS), Jo Boylan-Kemp (NLS), Sam Murphy (SSS), Karen Moss and Jon Tepper (S&T)
- Sign up for the [Success for All Newsletter](#)
- Visit the [Success for All SharePoint](#)
- Upcoming events (book through [CADQ events](#)):
 - 15 September, TILT BTEC Symposium (City).
 - 16 September, Understanding disparities in progression and attainment workshop (Clifton)
- Unconscious Bias Toolkit
The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team online Unconscious Bias toolkit.
For access to the module please contact [Amanda Dury](#)

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