

Exploring the role of digital diversity in learning and belonging



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'Access without support is not opportunity' (Tinto 2008)



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University is both a social and academic experience

Can be more challenging for diverse or under-represented groups entering university

'A culture of belonging' is critical
(Thomas, 2012)

WP literature – little or no attention to the role of informal, peer to peer support or technologies

Digital technologies research – little attention to diversity and mainly formal uses of social technologies

Digital diversity, learning and belonging (DD-lab)



- Funded by University of Bristol WP research programme – 2.5 years
- To investigate widening participation once students have begun their university education and how digital technologies are impacting on the successful engagement of diverse and under-represented students
- 2nd year undergraduates – 23 programmes – 6 faculties -2013/14

To what extent is 'a culture of belonging' and engagement experienced by WP students?

What are the impacts of informal support and peer relationships on WP students in their learning lives?

How are digital technologies being mobilised by WP students for educational, cultural and social purposes?

What new forms of learning interactions are created?

DD-Lab context and sample



Under-represented category	University of Bristol	DD-Lab sample
State school attendance	55%	31 (100%)
1 st . generation at university	Not collected	31 (100%)
Students from black and minority ethnic groups	11.5%	12 (35%)
Mature students	4.6%	11 (35%)
Local students	4.7%	7 (22.6%)

Participation of under-represented groups - year of entry 2012/13
(UoB Widening Participation statistical summary 3rd. Dec 2012)

Methodology



Longitudinal qualitative study:
Three data collection periods

- November
- February/ March
- April/May

- Co-researcher methodology
- iPad and Evernote to collect data
- Briefed to capture their 'learning lives'
- 6 to 8 notes or documents per month long period
- Collected 637 documentaries, including text accounts, audio, video, photos, snapshots from screen or documents, annotated notes.
- 54 Interviews and 5 focus groups

Challenges of diversity

- Divide between home and university
- Mixed feelings about home
- Moving into university after 1st year – diff exp with peers
- The haves and the have nots
- Where you live/can afford to live
- Commuting in – who is local?
- Age divides – mature means many things
- Not being able to replace technology
- Financial pressures
- Lack of studying strategies (for some)
- Teaching styles – big difference to school
- Assumptions of academic staff
- Lack of prior knowledge of areas such as Latin, Further Maths



Mobilising digital technologies – for learning and belonging



Integrating different elements of your life

Mobilising student voice
for action and dissent

Independently setting up groups themselves
- peer working, projects, whole programme

Alternative sources (to tutors and formal teaching)
of advice and guidance

Producing digital arts for relaxation

Maintaining connections with home , family and friends

Mentoring with outsiders

Organising events and knowing what is going on

Talking online about work across
different times and spaces

Maintaining links with the university from work

Photographing and scanning
resources to take with them

Validation of understanding and oneself

Creating artefacts

Engaging in and creating alternative learning spaces,
mixing the physical and the digital

Recording and sharing lecture notes online

Meeting up and hanging out!

Students' online social networking practices



the social and
the academic
are
intertwined



Sustaining connections to
home, other friends,
mentoring

Away from uni but still
'present'

Group spaces

discussions at scale, asking
'dumb' questions, checking,
reassurance, collaborative
work, problem solving

Social networking, especially
Facebook is pervasive but can
become exclusive and
excluding

More emphasis in WP needed on supporting participation IN university

Importance of getting to know and work with peers



Digital technologies

Helping to develop new forms of social and cultural capital
Integrate social and academic endeavours, new academic spaces

Support collaboration, connections to home and peers

Opportunities for empowerment – but also disempowerment

More critical for students whose academic identities may be more fragile, sense of belonging more complex

Students should be encouraged to develop their own academic and social networks and capacities

Students' researching their own learning helps their learning!

Next steps.....



- [Policy Bristol briefing paper](#) - over 100 distributed
- Influencing the Bristol Futures and BILT initiatives, work with SU and Student Services
- Working with the [Brightside Trust](#) and colleagues from Newcastle University on developing mechanisms for sharing stories of successful transitions
- ESRC/Newton funded project in South Africa

Thank you!



Full paper

Timmis, S., Yee, W., & Bent, E. (2016). Digital Diversity and Belonging in Higher Education: A Social Justice Proposition. In E.L. Brown, A.Krasteva, M. Ranieri, (Eds) *International Advances in Education: Global Initiatives for Equity and Social Justice, Volume 10. E-learning & Social Media: Education and Citizenship for the Digital 21st Century*. Information Age Publishing, Charlotte, N.C.

Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/295866381_Digital_Diversity_and_Belonging_in_Higher_Education_A_Social_Justice_Proposition

Project Website

<http://digitaldiversitylab.wordpress.com>

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Discussant

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Closing remarks

Professor Judith Squires

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