

Pedagogy, Culture and Student Wellbeing

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The rise of the zombie academy, the valuing of higher education in future earning potential terms solely and the attainment culture cultivated in the UK education system are creating a toxic environment for both students and staff.

Concerns around the wellbeing and mental health of the student population are well documented. In the 2017 report 'Not By Degrees' (pg34) the IPPR comments on the YouGov survey findings. Study was found to be the primary cause of stress among students, this is coupled with pressure to find a high-class degree as 'Finding a job after university' is the second highest cause of stress reported by students ("Not by degrees", 2017).

In addition, student wellbeing can be seriously compromised if the university is unable to create a caring environment, develop a sense of belonging among students and provide adequate campus-based counselling support (O'keeffe, 2013).

In parallel, there is an increase in childhood Mental ill-health and decrease in child wellbeing. A study published in the journal Psychological Medicine reported a rise in the number of 4 to 24 yrs olds with a longstanding mental health condition from 0.8% in 1995 to 4.8% in 2014 (The Guardian, 2018).



The most commonly cited sources of stress for school-age children and adolescents are pressure to achieve higher marks and concerns about receiving poor grades. The report found that study and assessment load were unrelated to schoolwork-related anxiety. But, the perceived relationship with teachers was found to have positive or negative impacts on anxiety levels. However, students who are highly motivated to achieve were more likely to feel anxious about a test. Students who received individual help when they were struggling science were less likely to report anxiety. (PISA 2015)

In addition, pedagogy and the design of assessments were also found to be important. Teachers were encouraged to help students identify their strengths and weaknesses, and provide guidance on how to mitigate weaknesses. Regular low-stakes tests, gradually increasing in difficulty can help students demonstrate their skills and build a sense of control were also recommended.

So, relationships and culture within schools are very important for students' sense of belonging and wellbeing. The generation of students that were the cohorts for these surveys are now undergraduate's in our Higher Education Institutions.

The increase in the proportion of young adults attending Higher Education Institutions has led to an increasingly diverse student intake ('Who's studying in HE?: Personal characteristics | HESA', n.d.), however this is not always represented in the curricula or in how the curricula are presented to students.

In recent years there has been growing dissatisfaction with what some students describe as 'pale, male and stale' curricula. This has resulted in some high profile student campaigns to decolonise the curriculum at a number of leading UK universities including UCL ('Why is My Curriculum White?', n.d.) and Cambridge University (<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/oct/25/cambridge-academics-look-to-decolonise-english-syllabus>), becoming a point of discussion and debate across the sector.

Selecting learning resources and situating learning in a manner that reflects the differing voices, perspectives and experiences of those generating and consuming knowledge are a fundamental part of compassionate pedagogy.