# 4 Reframing 'the problem': students from low socio-economic status backgrounds transitioning to university

Marcia Devlin and Jade McKay

## Abstract

*As higher education populations further diversify, new thinking and approaches are needed to ensure the successful transition to university of all students who are given access to higher education. This chapter challenges the notion of the student as 'the problem' when considering the transition to university of students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds. Based on an examination of key literature from Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and North America, this chapter argues that a deficit conception of students from low SES backgrounds is limited. It further argues that a deficit conception of the institutions into which these students transition is equally limited. Drawing on a recent national study (Devlin et al., 2012), this chapter examines a recently developed new conception, which positions successful transition to university for students from low SES backgrounds as a joint venture toward bridging socio-cultural incongruity (Devlin, 2011). This new conception privileges the agency, experience and contributions that these students bring to higher education, as well as institutional efforts to help students make the transition. The chapter proposes teaching and learning the discourse as a critical way to contribute to bridging socio-cultural incongruity and thereby assist students from low SES backgrounds to transition successfully to university.*

## Introduction

In an increasingly massified higher education system with greater numbers of students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds studying alongside more traditional cohorts of students, it is not only appropriate, but also essential, that institutions work towards successful experiences for all students (Devlin, 2010).[1] This is particularly pertinent considering the federal policy changes in Australia following the 2008 *Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education*, which increased the diversity of higher education student cohorts as the sector worked to meet targets related to increased participation of students from low SES backgrounds (Bradley et al., 2008). Pointing to the International Association of Universities (2008: 1), who have adopted the principle that 'access without a reasonable chance of success is an empty phrase', Devlin (2011) argues that the increasing number of diverse students in the Australian context necessitates a focus not only on access to university but also on success and achievement for all students once they have gained access.

One critical component of both achievement and success in higher education is a successful transition into university. In their extensive research on the first-year experience, Yorke and Longden (2008) identify the proactive management of student transition as an institutional activity that radically improves the chances of student success overall. Pittman and Richmond (2008) explain that students experience multiple transitions upon entering higher education, including changes in their living situations, negotiating academic environments, developing new friendships and, for younger students at least, adapting to greater independence and responsibility in their academic lives. Many students struggle with the transition to university, experiencing loneliness, distress, academic disengagement and even depression (see Wintre and Bowers, 2007; Adlaf et al., 2001; Gall, Evans and Bellerose, 2000; Wintre and Yaffe, 2000). However, Rose-Krasnor et al. (2010) claim that while the transition to university entails the adjustment to new roles and responsibilities, the transition can also present a positive opportunity for forging a new identity, forming new friendships and developing new interests (see also Lefkowitz, 2005). Christie et al. (2008) likewise refer to the excitement and exhilaration students can experience while making the transition to university.

---

[1]   Note that Marcia Devlin is a co-author of this chapter.

Based on a study of factors affecting the academic performance of Latino students in the United States (US), Cole and Espinoza (2008) raise the notion of cultural congruity and incongruity. This notion has resonance in relation to SES status and in particular to the level of socio-cultural congruence between students from low SES backgrounds and the higher education institutions in which they transition and study (Devlin, 2011). This chapter adopts a framework for conceptualising the transition of students from low SES backgrounds into higher education based on socio-cultural incongruence. It examines the notions of students from low SES backgrounds as 'the problem' and the institutions into which they move as 'the problem'. The chapter explores some of the characteristics associated with students from low SES backgrounds, providing a context for discussion about supporting their transition to university. Finally, it proposes teaching and learning the discourse as a critical way to contribute to bridging socio-cultural incongruity and thereby assist students from low SES backgrounds to transition successfully to university.

## Reframing 'the problem'

Literature and thinking related to students from low SES backgrounds often adopt a deficit conception. While some theorists problematise students, others view institutions as the 'problem'. Both discourses are premised on a deficit conception that this chapter argues is limited. Drawing on Devlin (2011), this chapter articulates the notion of socio-cultural incongruence as a way of conceptualising the differences in cultural and social capital between students from low SES backgrounds and the high SES of the institutions into which they move to study. In an attempt to reframe the problem of the deficit discourse, the chapter proposes a more nuanced approach to framing the complexities of the transition experience of students from low SES backgrounds — one that prioritises both the agency of students as well the role of the institution.

Cultural capital is a notion that is important to understanding the experiences of students from low SES in higher education. Cultural capital has been defined as 'proficiency in and familiarity with dominant cultural codes and practices' (Aschaffenburg and Mass, 1997: 573). Bourdieu (1977, 1984) suggests that the primary vehicle for the transmission of the 'ruling class' culture is the

education system. He suggests further that teachers and other staff, arguably those representing the ruling class, have the authority and the means to assess students and do so based on a set of assumptions, values and expectations that are not always made explicit. University students from higher socio-economic strata and more traditional backgrounds build familiarity with these assumptions, values and expectations over a lifetime (Devlin, 2010). They have what Margolis et al. (2001) refer to as a 'reservoir' of cultural and social resources and familiarity with 'particular types of knowledge, ways of speaking, styles, meanings, dispositions and worldviews' (ibid.: 8) when they come to university, which helps them to transition easily into, and feel comfortable at, university. Devlin (2009) has pointed out that some university students do not have such a 'reservoir' and that many students from low SES backgrounds fall into this second group (Devlin, 2011). Contrary to feeling comfortable at university, many such students can feel very uncomfortable and out of place. A comment from a student from a low SES background in the United Kingdom (UK) illustrates this discomfort:

> I find it really hard to integrate with … middle class people … I feel quite intimidated by this university and I feel as if I'm working class and I shouldn't be here … I just feel I'm no' good enough. (As cited in Christie et al., 2008: 576)

According to Lawrence (2005), achievement at university relies on socio-cultural capabilities relevant to the high SES context of university study. One element of such university socio-cultural competency includes appropriately seeking help and information. Seeking assistance would be particularly relevant to many students transitioning into university. Lawrence points out that the specific verbal and nonverbal means of asking for help can differ from subculture to subculture, and that seeking help may not be 'culturally "valued"', for example in 'individualist self-reliant sub-cultures' (ibid.: 250). However, at university, students are expected to be independent learners and this often means asking for help when necessary. In a recent (2011-12) national research project funded by the Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) in which both authors were research team members (see Devlin et al., 2012) student interviews were undertaken examining the effective teaching and support of students from low SES backgrounds. 40 out of 89 students from low SES backgrounds interviewed (45 per cent) commented on the importance of asking for help in terms of succeeding at university. In proffering advice to other

students, 34 out of 89 students (38 per cent) identified asking for help as critical to student success at university.

If a student does choose to ask for help, they also need to consider the words to use, whether to ask directly or indirectly and whether to include explanations or reasons, or not (Lawrence, 2005). As Lawrence explains, students may feel that they do not have the right to ask, or may equate seeking help as remedial. One student in Lawrence's study reported:

> I don't feel confident enough to speak to my tutor about the essay question because they might think I am stupid or something. (Psychology student, as cited in ibid.: 250)

Another student in Lawrence's study who had some experience of challenging feedback and who subsequently understood some of the tacit expectations explains:

> It's not a good idea to just walk in and say 'look this is crap'. You can't bulldoze your way through you have to be tactful about it … 'Look, I agree with this, but I think I've been hard done by with this bit for this reason'. (Nursing student, as cited in ibid.: 250)

According to Read, Archer and Leathwood (2003), there is a culture of academia that encompasses ways of thinking and acting that are dominant. Without guidance in the ways of this culture, students from low SES backgrounds may only learn that the sort of approach outlined above is 'not a good idea' through trial and error as they are transitioning into university (Devlin, 2011). This is not an ideal method of learning, especially given the significant risks involved for students entering and attempting to navigate a new culture.

When students unfamiliar with the norms and expectations of higher education transition in, they have to learn to become a university student (Christie et al., 2008) and master the university student 'role' (Collier and Morgan, 2008). Collier and Morgan refer to the 'implicit expectations' and 'tacit understandings' (ibid.: 426) which permeate the university study experience. Based on their North American research, they note that mastering the student role requires students to both understand the expectations of them and to meet those expectations successfully. This distinction between understanding and meeting expectations is important in relation to conceptualising the transition of students from low SES backgrounds. Collier and Morgan (ibid.) distinguish between a student's academic skills and actual capacity on one hand and their cultural capital and demonstrated

capacity on the other. They argue that whatever a student's actual capacity, their background and cultural capital affect their ability to understand tacit requirements and appropriately perform a university student's role and thereby demonstrate their capacity. They also point out that demonstrated capacity is what is examined and assessed at university. These researchers argue that if a comparison was made between two students who had equivalent understanding of course material, the student who better understood the need to respond to the tacit expectations of university staff members would perform better (ibid.). Success transitioning into, and participating at, university depends on understanding these unspoken requirements and being able to perform in ways that meet them (Devlin, 2011). But as Devlin (2010) points out, many students from low SES backgrounds do not know that these unspoken requirements exist, never mind that they must understand and then respond appropriately to them.

Collier and Morgan (2008) claim that how closely students can understand and relate to the tacit expectations of staff will have an impact on their performance, success and achievement at university. The following comments are examples of students from the study by Collier and Morgan (ibid.). These students were the first in their family to go to university and they found themselves 'getting it wrong' because they did not understand tacit expectations:

> 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. (As cited in ibid.: 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, and I did study at [community college], and he said 'No, this is not scientific writing'. So it is really hard to see what they want because they already see it, they already know it; they see what I don't. (As cited in ibid.: 440)

## The first deficit conception: students are 'the problem'

Much research has been conducted on elements of success at university within the individual student's sphere of influence (Devlin, 2011). This includes research on resilience (see Morales, 2000), self-efficacy (see Vuong, Brown-Welty and Tracz, 2010) and motivation (see McKavanagh and Purnell, 2007). While valuable, such research can be based on the assumption that university success is primarily the responsibility of individual students and can presuppose a level playing field in relation to socio-cultural and background characteristics (Devlin, 2011). As Devlin notes (ibid.), it can be seductive to think that if non-traditional students are clever enough, or try hard enough, or persevere enough, or believe enough in their own ability, they can succeed at university. After all, many have done so. Devlin (ibid.) cautions, however, that if seduced by this thinking, it follows then that any failure to succeed at university is the fault of the student, who is assumed to be in deficit. Unfortunately, such thinking prevails in higher education.

Greenbank (2006) argues that 'victim blaming' can result from the absence of social class being considered as a key influence on the university experiences of students from low SES backgrounds. If the tacit expectations inherent in university practices are within a socio-cultural subset that is peculiar to the upper SES levels, Devlin (2011) suggests this may exclude students from low SES backgrounds who are not familiar with the norms and discourses of these groups. These students can become victims of discrimination that impedes their success (ibid.).

## The second deficit conception: institutions are 'the problem'

Another possible frame is to problematise the institutions that are responsible for the success and progress of students from low SES backgrounds. Zepke and Leach (2005) examine the literature on how institutions might improve student retention and other outcomes and identify two different discourses on this issue. One discourse, which dominates the literature, centres on what institutions do to fit students into their existing cultures. Zepke and Leach suggest that the second discourse challenges the dominant one and is still emerging. Rather than requiring students to fit the existing institutional culture, it suggests that institutional cultures be adapted to better fit the needs of an increasingly diverse student body.

According to Bamber and Tett (2001), it is unfair to expect the burden of change to fall solely on the students and to suggest that institutions should make changes. Summarising the most influential research in widening participation in the UK, Billingham (2009) argues that the focus on barriers for non-traditional students needs to expand from situational and dispositional barriers to those created by institutional inflexibility. Tett states that 'the role of the educational institution itself in creating and perpetuating inequalities' (2004: 252) should be taken into account. Recent Australian research suggests that universities should make changes in terms of better heralding the expectations they have of students (James, Krause and Jennings, 2010). This suggestion is underpinned by an assumption that the deficit lies with the student in not understanding existing structures and expectations and with the institutions in not being clear enough about how they expect students to fit into these existing structures and expectations (Devlin, 2011). As Devlin notes,

> [w]hile explicitly informing students of their responsibilities is critical, this alone would constitute an inadequate response in terms of assisting them to meet these responsibilities and demonstrate their learning in a higher education culture. (Ibid.: 6)

Devlin points to the persuasive arguments of Collier and Morgan (2008) that understanding and mastering the university student role are two different requirements. Devlin (2010) argues that to genuinely contribute to the success and achievement of non-traditional students, universities will need to do much more than to spell out their expectations for student involvement in learning. Several authors suggest the importance of teaching the discourse to students from low SES backgrounds (Hutchings, 2006; Lawrence, 2005; Kirk, 2008; Northedge, 2003a, 2003b).

## *The socio-cultural conception: incongruence must be bridged*

According to Greenbank (2006), there is evidence suggesting that students from lower SES backgrounds may have greater difficulty adapting to university life because of incongruence between their cultural capital and the middle class culture encountered in higher education. Read, Archer and Leathwood argue that '[a]cademic culture is not uniformly accessed or experienced' (2003: 261). Devlin (2011) proposes the notion of 'socio-cultural incongruence' to describe

the circumstances where students from low SES backgrounds engage with the discourses, tacit expectations and norms of higher education.

To facilitate the success of students from low SES backgrounds, Bamber and Tett (2001) suggest that a two-way process of change and development is required. They recommend that institutions think beyond the deficit model of supporting students and reform teaching and student support. Billingham (2009) proposes active engagement by institutions in a 'joint venture' with the new population of students. Murphy's UK study (2009) of factors affecting the progress, achievement and outcomes of new students to a particular degree program found a number of characteristics specific to the institution and to individual students which promote progression and achievement. They refer to these factors as 'bridges'. Devlin (2011) proposes adoption of the notion of a bridge in the conceptualisation of changes that could be made to lessen or ease socio-cultural incongruence for students from low SES backgrounds at university. She summarises this as bridging socio-cultural incongruity (ibid.).

## Student agency

Both deficit conceptions outlined above negate the influence of student agency (Devlin, 2011). Luckett and Luckett (2009) note that both in traditions of learning theory that prioritise individual cognition and in those that prioritise the context in which learning occurs, 'the individual agent is dissolved' (ibid.: 469). Devlin proposes, similarly, that ways of thinking about the facilitation of the success of students from low SES backgrounds

> are divided into those that prioritise individual input to that process on one hand and those that prioritise the role of the institution in which the process takes place on the other. In both of these conceptualisations … the individual agent is considered less important. (2011: 7)

However, as Devlin notes, research by Luckett and Luckett (2009) indicates that 'the development of agency, as the student forges an identity and career path, is of critical importance in higher education' (2011: 476).

Devlin argues that '[s]tudents from low socio-economic backgrounds are not necessarily passive recipients of the middle and upper class culture and discourse of university' (ibid.: 7). While students from non-traditional backgrounds are disadvantaged by institutional cultures that place them as 'other', Read,

Archer and Leathwood (2003) maintain that individuals do not passively receive these cultural discourses but instead actively engage with them and attempt to challenge them. Indeed, Grant describes examples of students challenging the discourse of 'the independent learner' by deliberately studying with someone else as an 'interdependent learner' (1997: 112). In their research, Read, Archer, and Leathwood found non-traditional students refusing to accept a position of marginality in the academy and instead working '…to adopt the pragmatic practice of "adapting" to this culture in order to achieve' (2003: 272). They argue that non-traditional students understand the need to act in certain ways in order to be successful and give the example of a young, black, Caribbean university student in a UK institution deliberately acting confident in the "intimidating" competitive atmosphere' (ibid.: 273) of a seminar and advising a fellow student to do the same.

Devlin (2011) notes that there is also research to support the notion of non-traditional students participating knowingly in more than one culture concurrently. Exploring this issue, Priest (2009) refers to thinking in the US around 'code switching' — where black students are encouraged not to passively adopt an alternative discourse or code but instead to understand the value of the discourse or code they already possess as well as to understand the value of the alternative one associated with, for example, academic writing.

## Knowing the students

It can be argued that to enable, facilitate and support student agency, university teachers and other staff should know their students. This means knowing students' names, backgrounds, learning styles and preferences, needs, difficulties, strengths and/or weaknesses. It also means understanding the unique abilities and experiences which students from low SES backgrounds and other non-traditional students bring with them to university. In staff interviews conducted as part of the OLT-funded study exploring effective teaching and support of students from low SES backgrounds, 22 of 26 staff interviewees (85 per cent) identified knowing the make-up of the student cohort as central to facilitating student success. Some of the typical comments made by staff included:

> I think that the best advice I could say to anybody is talk to your students, find out about them, make them feel valued, make them feel important, that their knowledge and skills are as important as anybody else's, and to

106

> utilise those skills in particular areas. Nothing de-values somebody more than being made to feel like their skills aren't important … (COL_011)

> [Y]ou'll never know how to teach anybody anything unless you understand that person. You absolutely have to understand that, and I mean, I'm not necessarily saying you have to fully and totally understand a person, but you need to understand them in terms of the context of that knowledge you're trying to teach them … and that applies I think pre-eminently to … [those] from diverse backgrounds. (COL_016)

While agreeing with Kift's argument (2009) that it is necessary to apply caution to making assumptions about particular cohorts of students, this chapter also argues that it is helpful to know some of the characteristics commonly associated with students from low SES backgrounds in order to contribute successfully to bridging socio-cultural incongruence. As staff experienced and successful in teaching and supporting students from low SES backgrounds said in interviews conducted as part of the OLT study:

> [O]f course, you can't be inclusive unless you know your students, and I think you need to know your students; that is the most important thing. (COL_001)

> [I]t goes back to that very simplistic mantra, but the idea that you really do need to know your learner to be able to make a good judgment of where it is they want to go and where you can help them to go, so I think that's absolutely fundamental. (COL_016)

The factors identified in the literature as pertinent to students from low SES backgrounds include: financial strain; time pressures; competing priorities; unclear expectations of university; low confidence; academic preparedness; family support; and aspirations.

*Financial strain*

Somewhat unsurprisingly, the predominant characteristic associated with students from low SES backgrounds in the literature is that of finances. Students from low SES backgrounds often experience financial strain that can become a barrier to access and success in higher education (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1998), impacting both the choices they make (for example, mode of study, choice of institution) as well as their everyday experiences as students (Simister, 2011; David et al., 2010; Hayden and Long, 2006; Perna, 2000). On account of financial pressures,

education can also become a secondary priority for students who must often undertake paid employment (Greenbank, 2006). Data from student interviews in the recent national OLT study support these findings, testifying to the financial pressures and issues that they face. Typical comments from students include:

> I have three jobs and I still can't manage. (STU_104)

> I wouldn't be here now this term, this semester, if I hadn't been able to borrow every textbook I need. (STU_085)

> The free parking, that would be the final straw. If I had to pay for parking then it would be 'sayonara'. It might be something like $5 a day but that would be the end of me, so the free parking is huge. (STU_085)

*Time pressures*

Time pressures affect many students from low SES backgrounds. With the need to balance paid employment with study, financial pressures and, often, family responsibilities, many of these students are under greater time constraints than their more 'traditional' peers (David et al., 2010; Murphy, 2009; Henderson, Noble and De George-Walker, 2009; Benson et al., 2009; Hayden and Long, 2006; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; White, 2006; Winn, 2002; Douglass, Roebken and Thomson, 2007; Lynch and O'Riordan, 1998). One student in the recent OLT study explained the impact of the expectations of university study given their multiple commitments:

> I think sometimes, the expectations, though, from lecturers, when they say, you need to be doing five hours additional to what you're doing in class, like my first year of uni, I was doing twenty hours plus of in time class, and they were also saying, we want five hours on top of that for each year's subjects, and when you've got all these other things going on, like work, and just trying to adapt to uni life, that's a lot of time where you think, I can't do this, like you get very kind of stressed out … (STU_057)

*Competing priorities*

Finances and time are closely linked to another factor commonly associated with students from low SES backgrounds: competing priorities. As a result of financial pressures and time constraints, the literature suggests that education can often be lower on the list of priorities for students from low SES backgrounds (Crozier et al., 2008). The need to prioritise finances and paid employment, for

example, can result in many students seeing their studies as a mere 'means to an end' (ibid.: 175), which can impact on class attendance. The competing pressures and priorities that low SES students had to balance frequently arose in recent interviews:

> Well, having two jobs wasn't so easy. It was a bit difficult. Like I kind of took on two jobs because my father was ill and he didn't work for about six months. So I took on that extra job. (STU_097)

> It was difficult and — so I was just coming to the bare minimums — just the lectures, some tutes. I thought I could miss a few because I had to be at work, but I passed them, I don't know how. (STU_010)

*Unclear expectations of university*

Research also shows that students from low SES backgrounds often enter higher education with expectations that are disjunctive with the reality of university. These expectations can relate to teachers, teaching, assessment and university life and culture in general (Roberts, 2011; Brooks, 2004) and can significantly impact on their experiences in higher education. In their extensive research, Lynch and O'Riordan found that not knowing what to expect creates 'fears and anxieties which exacerbated practical difficulties' (1998: 461) for these students. This expectation-mismatch was substantiated in student interviews in the OLT study, with 36 of 89 student interviewees (40 per cent) commenting on the importance of expectations being made explicit:

> You can see what's coming, rather than just being blind. (STU_054)

> I mean, as I say it's got to be transparent, it's got to be set out so that you know exactly what they want. It's not something that you've got to guess at. (STU_082)

*Low confidence*

The disjunctive expectations and the lack of university-specific cultural capital held by students from low SES backgrounds can result in students entering higher education suffering from a lack of confidence. In their extensive study, which included 122 interviews, Lynch and O'Riordan found that students often 'did not believe in their own abilities' and felt that higher education was 'beyond their reach' (1998: 462). The literature suggests that a lack of self-esteem can

hinder a student's overall sense of belonging and impact the choices they make, for example, about accessing support services or seeking help from academic staff (David et al., 2010; Murphy 2009; Christie et al., 2008; Charlesworth, Gilfillan and Wilkinson, 2004; Benson et al., 2009; Lawrence, 2005). Lack of confidence can also result in many students having fewer friends than their middle class peers, finding it difficult to 'settle' into university life and consequently being more likely to entertain thoughts of dropping out (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1998).

As one student in the recent OLT study suggested when asked what advice they would offer to a new student from the same background, 'as you go along you get to feel a little bit more confident maybe when, when it's safe' (STU_101).

*Academic preparedness*

Another factor associated with students from low SES backgrounds in the literature which is relevant to transition is level of preparedness for university study. The disjunct between the cultural capital of students from low SES and the middle class culture of higher education institutions can result in different levels of academic preparedness (Murphy, 2009; Northedge, 2003a; Berger, 2000; Greenbank, 2006; Kift, 2009). One student from a low SES status background in a recent OLT study interview alluded to this:

> [T]he mature age students … in the classroom … always had all these
> really intelligent questions to ask, and I didn't have the knowledge to even
> formulate the question. (STU_056)

In the staff interviews carried out as part of the recent OLT study, one staff member reported that high attrition rates at their institution were directly related to students being ill-prepared for the realities of university:

> I think that some of them didn't realise what the workload and commitments
> for the university might've been. (COL_023)

Research also suggests that the skill set of students from low SES backgrounds may not equate to the skill set of more traditional students in terms of writing and language, research, computer and overall academic 'know-how' (Kirk, 2008; Fitzgibbon and Prior, 2006). When asked what their advice to other students entering higher education would be, many students from low SES backgrounds interviewed in the recent OLT study spoke of the importance of developing these skills:

Probably the first thing I'd suggest is make absolutely sure that you've got a reasonably good grasp of using, knowing and finding your way around a computer. … [I]t's going to be a lot easier if you do know your way around technology to a certain extent. (STU_082)

… [T]he other advice I would give would be that if you haven't studied at university before to, to try and get a hand or an academic writing if there was a good study course where you could learn how to write academically and cite, and references and all that sort of thing would be in fact really take the pressure, take the stress off the first initial unit even … (STU_101)

*Family support*

Another factor evident in the literature as relevant to students from low SES backgrounds is family support. Often the first in their families to attend university, students from low SES backgrounds can be without significant levels of support from family and friends (Murphy, 2009; Brooks, 2004; Hahs-Vaughn, 2004). In student interviews in the recent OLT study, which interviewed students from low SES backgrounds who were successful, family support emerged as a key determinant of student success in higher education. Of the 89 students interviewed, 78 students (88 per cent) commented on the importance of family support in their success. Typical comments included:

I am really lucky to have such a good family to support me and yeah it's … definitely been a huge part in my success at uni. Because if it wasn't for them, I probably wouldn't be here at all. (STU_003)

The fact that my son thinks it's cool and he knows that mummy's doing this to get us a better life. So in the meantime, he's missed out on so much because as I said I've been doing this course for two years … So I've lost a lot of time. But because he knows where it's going, he's let me do it. He's gone without weekends where I've been head down in an assignment, and it's just, 'It's okay mum, when you're finished we'll catch up'. (STU_084)

*Aspiration*

The final characteristic associated with students from low SES backgrounds in the literature is aspiration. Research shows that traditional students often have higher aspirations than students from lower SES backgrounds (Bowden and Doughney, 2010; Shallcross and Hartley, 2009; Walpole, 2008; Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Tett, 2004;

Lynch and O'Riordan, 1998). However, this claim is somewhat challenged by the findings emerging from the recent study, which focused on successful students from low SES backgrounds, who expressed high levels of aspiration and determination to succeed in their studies:

> I want that cap and gown, and I want someone to call my name out. (STU_062)

> My desire has kept me on focus. I want that piece of paper. (STU_066)

These factors and characteristics drawn from the literature and recent research are important to informing understanding of the issues that students from low SES backgrounds may face in higher education. However, this chapter argues that these factors and characteristics also challenge deficit discourses surrounding non-traditional students. While many of these factors are barriers to student success, the literature testifies to the resilience and determination these students demonstrate in order to overcome these barriers. The OLT study further supports this argument. Results from the student interviews show that 56 of 89 students interviewed (63 per cent) believed that they were successful because they applied themselves and worked hard, 47 of 89 students interviewed (53 per cent) attributed their success to planning ahead and/or goal-setting, and 45 of 89 students interviewed (51 per cent) stated their success was a result of their attitude toward study.

In the staff interviews in the same study, similar findings about the determination and resilience of these students emerged:

> I just think it's very interesting that we often look at low SES and sort of go 'okay, alright, they're not going to have the study skill management or the time skill management, they're the first one in their family to go to university, they're not going to understand all the rigour and the words and all the rest' but then I look at them and go 'well actually a lot of these kids are determined to be here and they're determined to work harder and they're determined to finish'. And they're going to ask a question if they don't know because there's nobody else to tell them so they'll come to you and ask, whereas other kids who sort of have been spoon fed will look at it and go 'well you didn't tell me to do anything else so I didn't'. (COL_01)

> I've found that … low SES kids … are just very determined. They're very smart and determined people and it takes them a couple of years to nut out the system but if you are halfway welcoming, they can do it very quickly. (COL_00)

In addition to recognising this determination and 'academic grit', others interviewed in the OLT study pointed to the potential contributions students from low SES can make to higher education:

> [I]t's about acknowledging students … And trying to tap in to some little something, you know some little strength that they might have, some little narrative that they might have that we can all sort of share in, in order to build that self worth if you like, that sense of … why it is that they're here and their contribution is just as valuable. (COL_015)

The final section explores teaching and learning academic discourse as a contribution to bridging socio-cultural incongruity.

## Cultural capital and academic discourse

In his prolific work on teaching in the context of diversity, Northedge claims that teaching challenges related to an increasingly diverse student body in higher education 'call for a more radical shift in teaching than simply incorporating remedial support within existing teaching programs' (2003b: 17). He proposes an emphasis on the socio-cultural nature of learning and teaching. This would include 'modelling learning as acquiring the capacity to participate in the discourses of an unfamiliar knowledge community, and teaching as supporting that participation' (ibid.). Based on her Australian research, Lawrence (2005) proposes the active facilitation of students' use of reflective, socio-cultural and critical practice to assist them to become enculturated into the ways of the university, while being cognisant of both the presence of more than one set of cultural assumptions and of the potential incongruence of these assumptions. In both cases, notes Devlin (2011), students would need to be prepared to take the risks and opportunities inherent in joining a new community and to persevere in order to ensure the learning required to function effectively in that community. Here the notion of both students and institutions/teachers making contributions to ensuring the success of the transition of low SES students to university is clear — the socio-cultural incongruity is bridged by the joint venture between the two parties.

While recognising the varied and many suggestions in the literature around how best to empower students from low SES backgrounds and bridge socio-cultural incongruence, this section focuses on teaching and learning the discourse. Teaching the discourse is an important process for facilitating the cultural capital

required to 'code switch' and to thereby contribute to bridging socio-cultural incongruence. Without knowledge of — and eventually a proficiency in — academic discourse, students can struggle to communicate, participate and feel that they belong in higher education. Teaching and learning the discourse can facilitate an empowering transition into university culture for students from low SES backgrounds.

The research and scholarship around teaching and learning the discourse to students in higher education encompasses a broad range of viewpoints. Priest (2009) explains that some theorists view teaching the discourse as reinforcing 'an unjust social system' in which the message is propagated that some discourses are more 'valid than others' (2009: 75; see also Bruch and Marback, 1997; Rice, 2008). In contrast, others deny that there is 'any potential injustice, implicit or not, in the teaching of academic languages and literacies' (Priest, 2009: 75; see also Bloom, 1997). In this chapter, we accept the legitimacy of the argument that academic discourse is dominant and essentially middle class and therefore necessarily subverts other discourses. However, it can be equally argued that it is possible to teach academic discourse without 'blindly reinforcing messages of cultural inferiority or reinscribing unjust power relations' (Priest, 2009: 76). Further, as the current authors have elsewhere argued (McKay and Devlin, 2014), not only is it possible but it is essential that academic discourse be taught and learnt. Students from low SES backgrounds should be provided with opportunities to enable their contribution to bridge the socio-cultural incongruity that they meet on entering higher education. Teaching academic language — or what has been referred to as the language of power within the academy (Bruch and Marback, 1997) — brings to the fore issues of cultural privilege appositely delineated by Margolis (1994). However, to allow notions of cultural privilege to impede institutions from teaching academic discourse to students from low SES backgrounds is to disempower and disadvantage them further (McKay and Devlin, 2014).

Those students who are familiar with academic language and conventions are, according to Hutchings, '*immediately enabled, both in their learning and their sense of identity*' (2006: 259; emphasis added). In their research, Clark and Ivanic (1997) found that the sense of belonging that students experience in their institutions is clearly affected by the discourses that students bring with them.

Hutchings (2006) agrees, stressing that the level of acquaintance students have with academic language and practices can determine their feelings of belonging in higher education. Further, Hutchings suggests that a familiarity and prior knowledge of academic discourse can determine the speed with which complex 'concepts and readings are grasped and understanding is articulated in discussions and writing' (ibid.: 259). On the basis of their research, both Priest (2009) and Corkery (2009) conclude that a proficiency in academic discourse is more likely to translate into success at university.

McKay and Devlin (2014) explain that students from low SES backgrounds often enter university with no familiarity with academic discourse — either the language or its conventions. This lack of acquaintance can leave many students feeling vulnerable and can impact on their ability as well as their desire to communicate and participate (Hutchings, 2006). This claim is substantiated by interviews with students from low SES backgrounds in the recent national study where 37 of 89 students (42 per cent) spoke directly of, and/or alluded to, the importance to their success at university of being taught academic language, writing and discourse. Some of the typical comments made by students include:

> Even the simple things, which some may not think that valuable but someone like me, the essay — how to write an essay for instance, the correct format and what not — that sort of stuff, that basic stuff which would seem very basic to some or the seasoned university students, but to someone like me, it was invaluable in my learning process. (STU_046)

> [T]hat's half of the battle when you're first starting, learning how to write academically and it's still a battle. (STU_101)

> But yeah … [an introductory course] is very useful for people like me who have never been to an academic institution and didn't know that much about academic writing and stuff … (STU_082)

Not to help these students with academic discourse, Elbow argues, 'is simply to leave a power vacuum and thereby reward privileged students who have already academic discourse at home or in school — or at least learned the roots of propensity for academic discourse' (1991: 135). It is therefore critical that non-traditional students, particularly those from low SES backgrounds, be taught and learn academic discourse.

## *Socio-cultural empowerment through teaching and learning the discourse*

Hutchings stresses that becoming literate in academic language entails more than just learning how to use the language. Knowledge of the wider rules, practices and conventions are essential, particularly for those students who are unfamiliar with academic discourse (Hutchings, 2006; Edelsky, 1996). As McKay and Devlin (2014) suggest, a critical component of teaching the discourse relates to teaching the rules and conventions of academic discourse. This means making explicit to those students who may not be familiar with academic discourse its implied rules, practices and conventions. To not teach students this broader knowledge of academic discourse can result in them feeling isolated, intimidated and forced into silence (Hutchings, 2006). Such feelings can then impact on students' successful transition into an unfamiliar world and their willingness to participate in a new knowledge community (Hutchings, 2006; McKay and Devlin, 2014). Lawrence (2005) refers to this first component of teaching academic discourse as engaging students in the relevant discourses, which include ways of thinking, ways of writing and the specific tone and style of essays. Formal academic discourse tutorials and academic study skills sessions may be an appropriate way to engage students in the relevant discourses, and Lawrence (ibid.) argues that these would ideally be provided when students first enter university.

According to the literature, the second component of teaching and learning the discourse is enabling participation in that discourse. It is essential that students be empowered to practice using academic discourse in order for them to become active members of the knowledge community. Drawing on the work of Etienne Wenger (1998), Matusov and Hayes explain the importance of students being enabled to participate in the knowledge community:

> Learning is always a question about membership in the community and participation in the community practices. A novice is not simply a person who lacks some entities, called 'skills', but rather a newcomer who needs to negotiate her or his participation in the community practices. (2002: 243)

Learning academic discourse, Lawrence (2005) claims, is dependent on students both mastering and demonstrating the discourse and cultural practices. To facilitate their mastering of the discourse, learning environments should encourage student

participation and thereby provide the opportunity for students to demonstrate their proficiency and develop a voice within higher education (Northedge, 2002; Northedge 2003b). Northedge explains:

> Voice requires a sense of one's identity within the discourse community. For students with little experience in academic communities, the struggle to develop an effective voice … can be long and difficult. Yet, until they do, their grades suffer, since their progress can only be registered through speaking the discourse. Support in establishing voice is a vital component of courses for students from diverse backgrounds. (2003b: 25)

According to Northedge (2002), learning environments should allow for vicarious participation, where students learn how the discourse works and how meanings are framed within it from more experienced discourse members. Such environments, Northedge (ibid.) argues, would also allow for generative participation whereby students take responsibility for framing shared meaning and practise projecting meaning to others within the knowledge community. This is when real learning takes place, in that learning is ultimately a process of becoming increasingly proficient as both 'a user of various specialist discourses' and 'a participant within the relevant knowledge communities' (2003b: 22). For students to become competent in academic discourse, they need to be provided with sufficient opportunity to practice using and participating in that discourse to ensure they feel that they belong in higher education as rightful members of the knowledge community. These ideas accord with those of Collier and Morgan (2008) and Christie et al. (2008), outlined earlier, of understanding and demonstrating capacity, and learning to become a student at university.

The final component of teaching and learning the discourse pertains to the guided navigation of students through the discourse (Northedge, 2003a, 2003b; McKay and Devlin, 2014). Guiding and actively supporting students from low SES backgrounds as they navigate their way through academic discourse empowers them to participate further in the knowledge community and thereby develop strong student identities (Northedge, 2003b). Northedge (ibid.) and Lawrence (2005) both stress the importance of guided navigation by teachers and its centrality to students successfully learning academic discourse. Northedge proposes supported participation in the knowledge communities to help those who are often struggling to 'make meaning in strange intellectual and social surroundings' (2003b: 17).

Lawrence (2005) claims that students need to be assisted in navigating their way through the various discourses and literacies that they are expected to engage with, master and demonstrate. Matusov and Hayes also argue that '[s]tudents require guided initiation into the discourse', as it 'is crucial to their becoming active members of a community of practice' (2002: 243).

Northedge suggests this is why the role of a teacher is so important: 'The teacher, as a speaker of the specialist discourse, is able to "lend" students the capacity to frame meanings they cannot yet produce independently' (2003a: 172). However, while guiding navigation, Northedge insists that teachers take into consideration 'where the student is starting from' (2003b: 31) and apply tolerance to any variances in understanding. Lawrence (2005, 2003) agrees, arguing that teachers should be willing to guide students through the process of learning academic discourse with an understanding that while these students bring with them different discourses, they should not be viewed as under-prepared or intellectually deficient.

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued that deficit notions of students from low SES status backgrounds entering and succeeding at university are limited. It has also argued that deficit notions of the institutions into which the students transition are also limited. The chapter has engaged the conceptual notion of bridging socio-cultural incongruity as an alternative for 'the problem'. It has also argued that while caution in making assumptions about cohorts of students is warranted, it is also helpful to understand common characteristics of students from low SES backgrounds as part of knowing the students. Finally, the chapter has proposed teaching and learning academic discourse as a critical component of bridging socio-cultural incongruity and enabling the successful transition to university of students from low SES backgrounds.

## Acknowledgements

## References

Adlaf, E.M., L. Glikisman, A. Demers and B. Newton-Taylor. 2001. 'The prevalence of elevated sychological distress among Canadian undergraduates: findings from the 1998 Canadian Campus Survey'. *Journal of American College Health*, 50: 67-72.

Aschaffenburg, K. and I. Mass. 1997. 'Cultural and educational careers: the dynamics of social reproduction'. *American Sociological Review*, 62: 573-87.

Bamber, J. and L. Tett. 2001. 'Ensuring integrative learning experiences for nontraditional students in higher education'. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 3(1): 8-16.

Benson, R., L. Hewitt, A. Devos, G. Crosling and M. Heagney. 2009. 'Experiences of students from diverse backgrounds: the role of academic support'. Conference paper. *32nd HERDSA Annual Conference: The Student Experience*, 6-9 July, Darwin (545-50).

Berger, J.B. 2000. 'Optimizing capital, social reproduction, and undergraduate persistence: a sociological perspective', in J. Braxton (ed.), *Reworking the student departure puzzle*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press (95-124).

Billingham, S. 2009. 'Diversity, inclusion, and the transforming student experience'. Conference paper. *18th European Access Network Annual International Conference*, 22-24 June, York.

Bloom, L.Z. 1997. 'Teaching my class'. *JAC*, 17(2): 207-13.

Bourdieu, P. 1977. 'Cultural reproduction and social reproduction', in J. Karabel and A.H. Halsey (eds), *Power and ideology in education*. New York: Oxford University Press (487-551).

Bourdieu, P. 1984. *Distinction: a social critique of the judgment of taste*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P. 1994. *Language and symbolic power*. Oxford: Polity Press.

Bowden, M.P. and J. Doughney. 2010. 'Socioeconomic status, cultural diversity and the aspirations of secondary students in the western suburbs of Melbourne, Australia'. *Higher Education*, 59(1): 115-29.

Bradley, D., P. Noonan, H. Nugent and B. Scales. 2008. *Review of Australian Higher Education: final report*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Brooks, R. 2004. '"My mum would be as pleased as punch if I actually went, but my dad seems a bit more particular about it": paternal involvement in young people's higher education choices'. *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(4): 495-515.

Bruch, P. and R. Marback. 1997. 'Race identity, writing, and the politics of dignity: reinvigorating the ethics of "Students' right to their own language"'. *JAC*, 17(2): 267-81.

Charlesworth, S.J., P. Gilfillan and R. Wilkinson. 2004. 'Living inferiority'. *British Medical Bulletin*, 69: 49-60.

Christie, H., L. Tett, V.E. Cree, J. Hounsell and V. McCune. 2008. '"A real rollercoaster of confidence and emotions": learning to be a university student'. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(5): 567-81.

Clark, R. and R. Ivanic. 1997. *The politics of writing*. London: Routledge.

Cole, D. and A. Espinoza. 2008. 'Examining the academic success of Latino students in Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) majors'. *Journal of College Student Development*, 49(4): 285-300.

Collier, P.J. and D.L. Morgan. 2008. '"Is that paper really due today?": differences in first-generation and traditional college students' understandings of faculty expectations'. *Higher Education*, 55(4): 425-46.

Corkery, C. 2009. '"Who taught you like that!?" A study of communicative role models and academic literacy skills'. *Composition Forum*, 19 (Spring). http://compositionforum.com /issue/19/ [accessed 9 September 2011].

Crozier, G., D. Reay, J. Clayton, L. Colliander and J. Grinstead. 2008. 'Different strokes for different folks: diverse students in diverse institutions — experiences of higher education'. *Research Papers in Education*, 23(2): 167-77.

David, M., A.M. Bathmaker, G. Crozier, P. Davis, H. Ertl, A. Fuller, G. Hayward,

S. Heath, C. Hockings, G. Parry, D. Reay, A. Vignoles and J. Williams. 2010. *Improving learning by widening participation in higher education. Improving Learning Series*. London: Routledge.

Devlin, M. 2009. 'Low socioeconomic status and Indigenous background: implications for first year curriculum'. Keynote address. First Year Experience Curriculum Design Symposium, Queensland University of Technology, 5-6 February, Queensland. http://www.fyecd2009.qut.edu.au/program/Marcia_Devlin.jsp [accessed 28 May 2010].

Devlin, M. 2010. 'Non-traditional student achievement: theory, policy and practice in Australian higher education'. Keynote Address. *First Year in Higher Education (FYHE) International Conference*, June 27-30, Adelaide. http://www.fyhe.com.au/past_papers /papers10/content/pdf/Marcia_Devlin_keynote_4.pdf [accessed 14 April 2011].

Devlin, M. 2011. 'Bridging socio-cultural incongruity: conceptualising the success of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in Australian higher education'. *Studies in Higher Education*, 1-11. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.613991 [accessed 20 December 2011].

Devlin, M. and J. McKay. 2011. 'Inclusive teaching and support of university students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds'. Discussion paper. Higher Education Research Group, Deakin University, Melbourne: 1-8. http://www.lowses.edu.au/files/resources.htm [accessed 3 January 2012].

Devlin, M., J. McKay, S. Kift, K. Nelson and L. Smith. 2012. *Effective teaching and support of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds: resources for Australian higher education*, OLT Project. Available at http://www.lowses.edu.au.

Douglass, J.A., H. Roebken and G. Thomson. 2007. *The immigrant university: assessing the dynamics of race, major and socioeconomic characteristics at the University of California*. Berkeley: Center for Studies in Higher Education, University of California.

Edelsky, C. 1996. *With literacy and justice for all: rethinking the social in language and education*. London: Taylor and Francis.

Elbow, P. 1991. 'Reflections on academic discourse: how it relates to freshman and colleagues'. *College English*, 53(2): 135-55.

Fitzgibbon, K. and J. Prior. 2006. 'Students' early experiences and university interventions: a timeline to aid undergraduate student retention'.

*Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 8(3): 17-27.

Gall, T.L., D.R. Evans and S. Bellerose. 2000. 'Transition to first year university: patterns of change in adjustment across life domains and time'. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 19: 544-67.

Grant, B. 1997. 'Disciplining students: the construction of student subjectivities. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 18(1): 101-14.

Greenbank, P. 2006. Institutional widening participation policy in higher education: dealing with the "issue of social class"'. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 8(1): 1-10.

Hahs-Vaughn, D. 2004. 'The impact of parents' education level on college students: an analysis using the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study 1990-92/94'. *Journal of College Student Development*, 45(5): 296-316.

Hayden, M. and M. Long. 2006. 'A profile of part-time undergraduates in Australian universities'. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 25(1): 37-52.

Henderson, R., K. Noble and L. De George-Walker. 2009. 'Transitioning into university: "interrupted" first year students problem-solving their way into study'. *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development*, 6(1): 51-64.

Hutchings, C. 2006. 'Reaching students: lessons from a writing centre'. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 25(3): 247-61.

International Association of Universities. 2008. *Equitable access, success and quality in higher education: a policy statement by the International Association of Universities*. Adopted by IAU 13th General Conference, Utrecht, July. http://www.iau-aiu.net/access_he/access_statement.html [accessed 25 May 2010].

James, R., K. Krause and C. Jennings. 2010. *The first year experience in Australian universities: findings from 1994 to 2009*. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra, Australia.

Kift, S. 2009. 'A transition pedagogy: the first year experience curriculum design symposium 2009'. *HERDSA News*, 31(1): 1-4.

Kirk, K. 2008. 'Diversity and achievement: developing the learning of nontraditional HE students', in G. Crosling, L. Thomas and M. Heagney

(eds), *Improving student retention in higher education: the role of teaching and learning*. Oxford: Routledge (150-9).

Lawrence, J. 2003. 'The "deficit-discourse" shift: university teachers and their role in helping first year students persevere and succeed in the new university culture'. Conference paper. *6th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference*, 8-10 July 2002, Christchurch. http://eprints.usq.edu.au/5469/1/Lawrence_Ultibase_March_2003_PV.pdf.

Lawrence, J. 2005. 'Addressing diversity in higher education: two models for facilitating student engagement and mastery', in A. Brew and C. Asmar (eds), *Research and Development in Higher Education*, 28: 243-52.

Lefkowitz, E.S. 2005. '"Things have gotten better": developmental changes among emerging adults after the transition to university'. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 20: 40-63.

Luckett, K. and T. Luckett. 2009. 'The development of agency in first generation learners in higher education: a social realist analysis'. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 14(5): 469-81.

Lynch, K. and C. O'Riordan. 1998. 'Inequality in higher education: a study of class barriers'. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 19(4): 445-78.

Margolis, E., M. Soldatenko, S. Acker and M. Gair. 2001. 'Peekaboo', in E. Margolis (ed.), *The hidden curriculum in higher education*. New York: Routledge.

Matusov, E. and R. Hayes. 2002. 'Building a community of educators versus effecting conceptual change', in G. Wells and G. Claxton (eds), *Learning for Life in the 21st Century: sociocultural perspectives on the future of education*. Individual Students: Multicultural Education for Pre-Service Teachers. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers (239-51).

McKavanagh, M. and K. Purnell. 2007. 'Student learning journey: supporting student success through the Student Readiness Questionnaire'. *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development*, 4(2): 27-38.

McKay, J. and M. Devlin. 2014. 'Demystifying the higher education culture for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds'. *Higher Education Research & Development*.

Morales, E. 2000. 'A contextual understanding of the process of educational resilience: high achieving Dominican American students and the 'resilience cycle'. *Innovative Higher Education*, 25(1): 7-22.

Moreau, M. and C. Leathwood. 2006. 'Balancing paid work and studies: working (-class) students in higher education'. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(1): 23-42.

Murphy, B. 2009. 'Great expectations? Progression and achievement of less traditional entrants to higher education'. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 11(2): 4-14.

Northedge, A. 2002. 'Organizing excursions into specialist discourse communities: a sociocultural account of university teaching', in G. Wells and G. Claxton (eds), *Learning for life in the 21st Century: sociocultural perspectives on the future of education*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers (252-64).

Northedge, A. 2003a. 'Enabling participation in academic discourse'. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 8(2): 169-80.

Northedge, A. 2003b. 'Rethinking teaching in the context of diversity'. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 8(1): 17-32.

Perna, L. 2000. 'Racial and ethnic group differences in college enrolment decisions', in A. Cabrera and S. La Nasa (eds), *Understanding the college choice of disadvantaged students*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass (65-83).

Pittman, L. and A. Richmond. 2008. 'University belonging, friendship quality, and psychological adjustment during the transition to college'. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 76(4): 343-62.

Priest, A. 2009. '"I have understanding as well as you": supporting the language and learning needs of students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds'. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, 3(3): A1-A12.

Read, B., L. Archer and C. Leathwood. 2003. 'Challenging cultures? Student conceptions of "belonging" and "isolation" at a post-1992 university'. *Studies in Higher Education*, 28(3): 261-77.

Rice, J.A. 2008. 'Politicizing critical pedagogies for the logic of late capitalism'. *Composition Forum*, 18 (Summer). http://compositionforum.com/issue/18 [accessed 30 September 2011].

Roberts, S. 2011. 'Traditional practice for non-traditional students? Examining the role of pedagogy in higher education retention'. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 35(2): 182-99.

Rose-Krasnor, L., G. Adams, J. Polivy, S.M. Pancer, M.W. Pratt, S. Birnie-Lefcovitch and M. Wintre. 2010. 'A Longitudinal study of breadth and

intensity of activity involvement and the transition to university'. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 21(2): 512-18.

Shallcross, L. and J. Hartley. 2009. *A step out of poverty: aspirations, retention, and transformation*. Paper presented at the EOPHEA Conference, Sydney.

Simister, J. 2011. 'Elitism and meritocracy in UK universities: the UK needs investment in its labour force'. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 65(2): 113-44.

Tett, L. 2004. 'Mature working-class students in an "elite" university: discourses of risk, choice and exclusion'. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 36(2): 252-64.

Vuong, M., S. Brown-Welty and S. Tracz. 2010. 'The effects of self-efficacy on academic success of first-generation college sophomore students'. *Journal of College Student Development*, 51(1): 50-64.

Walpole, M. 2008. 'Emerging from the pipeline: African American students, socioeconomic status, and college experiences and outcomes'. *Research in Higher Education*, 49(3): 237-55.

Wenger, E. 1998. *Communities of practice: learning, meaning, and identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

White, S. 2006. 'Who will look after the kids? The practicalities faced by a group of mothers participating in pre-service teacher education in New Zealand'. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 8(3): 7-16.

Winn, S. 2002. 'Student motivation: a socioeconomic perspective'. *Studies in Higher Education*, 27(1): 445-57.

Wintre, M.G. and C.D. Bowers. 2007. 'Predictors of persistence to graduation: extending a model and data on the transition to university model'. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 39: 220-34.

Wintre, M.G. and M. Yaffe. 2000. 'First year students' adjustment to university life as a function of relationships with parents'. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 15: 9-37.

Yorke, M. and B. Longden. 2008. *The first year experience of higher education in the UK*. Final report. York, UK: The Higher Education Academy.

Zepke, N. and L. Leach. 2005. 'Integration and adaptation: approaches to the student retention and achievement puzzle'. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 6(1): 46-59.