Chapter 7

Precariat insurgency: A means to improve structures of inclusivity in higher education

Jasmine Holland-Gilbert

Meritocratic access to education is recognized as a human right and a tool of social justice (UN, n.d.). However, there are enduring structures of inequality within the British education system that result in some groups having greater access and representation than others. In response, in 2001 the British government released targets to increase participation in higher education to 50 per cent by 2010 (HEFCE, 2001). To achieve these figures, higher education institutions were expected to implement widening participation initiatives not only to increase the numbers of students who enter higher education, but also to increase the proportion of students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds (those from low-income backgrounds, black and minority ethnic individuals, and first-generation entry into higher education). While this has succeeded to varying extents, there is still a large disparity around the intake and retention of students from non-traditional backgrounds, particularly within prestigious institutions. According to the Office for Fair Access (OFFA, 2014, 2017), while more disadvantaged young people are in higher education than ever before, the discrepancies between institutions and the numbers of those students leaving before completing their studies continues to grow.

The above categories of non-traditional students are not just under-represented within the field of higher education; these students also experience restricted levels of economic, cultural and social capital within wider society and are therefore marginalized to varying extents within different facets of everyday life. The complexities of marginalization often lead to misrepresentation of the data relative to why some sections of society are so under-represented within institutions of higher education. Widening participation statistics and initiatives are overwhelmingly framed in relation to self-contained categories of race, economic brackets or family

educational background. However, these predefined categories overlook many of the more nuanced realities of intersectionality and only reflect the most notable categories of non-traditional students. While categories such as race and class tend to be thought of as mutually exclusive, these categories often overlap and intersect (Collins, 2015), because identity is informed by a multitude of environmental influences and is therefore multi-dimensional. Based on this reality, a proportion of non-traditional students encompass multiple marginalized identities at once, which positions them as more disadvantaged than those who encompass a singular marginalized identity. This also positions many of those that exist at the intersections of marginality as precariat. The term 'precariat' refers to anyone who has inhibited access to both tangible and immaterial resources and security, and the resultant precarious existence this creates (Standing, 2011).

While there is potential for someone who only encompasses one category of marginalization to exist as precariat, the chances are heightened for someone who is positioned at the intersections of marginality. Someone who is working-class, from an ethnic minority background and with a history of poor mental health is disproportionately more likely to experience a multiplicity of limitations and barriers to resources, such as employment and education. They are placed in situations of precarity, such as a lack of economic security and experiences of extreme social and cultural marginalization. They are therefore the most deprived British class of all, with low levels of economic, cultural and social capital (Savage and Devine, 2013).

Numbers of precariat university students and graduates are minimal, with most people who can be defined as such having little or no educational qualifications (Savage, 2015). While the decision to engage, or not, in education is initially related to issues of both economics and identity and is formed, reformed, and at times transformed throughout one's life, for those who do make it into higher education there are still a multiplicity of barriers that affect experience, achievement and retention. This is because the structures and systems that inform trends of engagement and retention within higher education are embedded within the fact that institutions of education often 'reproduce and perpetuate not only the socio-economic and political inequalities of the surrounding society but also the violent relationships that surround them' (Harber, 2004: 20). As a result, higher education tends to uphold structures of elitism, Eurocentrism and racism. This is evidenced across a wide body of research that argues that the practices and values of higher education institutions reflect a white, middle-class habitus that acts to marginalize students who do not fit these categories (Broadhead, 2015;

Hatton, 2012; Lehmann, 2009; Reay, 2001). Institutional habitus therefore affects the type of institutions non-traditional students select (Reay, 2001), as well as their academic and social experience, which has direct implications towards achievement and retention (Thomas, 2010).

If the field of higher education is to actively commit to improving the engagement and retention of non-traditional students, embedded structures of inequality must be recognized and transformed. This chapter has been developed around research into a widening participation project that aims to do exactly that. Currently running in a small number of academic and visual arts institutions of higher education is a widening participation project called the Open Book Project. The Open Book Project provides a free education programme for adults from marginalized backgrounds, such as individuals coming from crime and addiction backgrounds, those with a history of poor mental health, or, more generally, anyone who has had inhibited access to education due to structural and cultural factors, for example those pertaining to race, class or disabilities. The project works with a range of community organizations to provide open access workshops, in a range of academic and arts-based subjects. In addition, for those who choose it, it also offers a pathway into higher education and ongoing support for students throughout their time in higher education. Since the project was founded in 2003, over 200 participants have achieved higher education qualifications and many more have had fulfilling learning experiences.

Due to the complexities of marginalization, almost all Open Book Project participants exist within the intersections of the multiple categories of marginalization mentioned above. They are therefore often positioned as precariat and always exist as non-traditional within the context of formal education. In response to this, the project utilizes inclusive teaching and learning practices, while also building a community of practice, whereby participants act as each other's support network. In doing so, the project aims to positively enhance participants' lives, while also improving precariat engagement and retention within higher education. It thereby encourages wider institutional change, through challenging the systems and structures that constitute such individuals as marginalized.

Having worked for the Open Book Project for some years, it has become apparent to me that the project not only achieves its aims, but in doing so it exists as a unique example of how to combat multiple structures of inequality within higher education, through a single set of practices. As part of an action-based research project called RAS (Retain, Achieve, Succeed, 2012–17), within the University of the Arts London, I sought to

develop an understanding of how this process takes place and potentially offer a framework for other institutions who wish to challenge structures of inequality and improve inclusivity.

Due to the marginalized nature of Open Book Project participants and my position as staff within the project, I felt it important to use a collaborative approach to the research. This included participant observation, focus groups and unstructured interviews, conducted with project participants, past and present. This chapter has been developed around findings from my RAS research report (Holland-Gilbert, 2016). To contextualize participant experiences this analysis will begin with an exploration of existing literature on the relationship between identity, institutional habitus and feelings of belonging within education. In particular it will focus on the intersectional experiences of marginalization and the perceived deficiency of marginalized groups within society and the field of higher education. This will be followed by an analysis of the Open Book Project that will consider the ways in which the project employs inclusive teaching and learning practices and facilitates the development of 'communities of practice' (Wegner, 1998), in relation to themes of autonomy and parity, in order to engage the most marginalized sections of society. I will then assess the effectiveness of the project to equip participants for the experience of becoming non-traditional students within their respective courses and institutions, arguing that they learn how to navigate the field of higher education, while also maintaining pride in their 'othered' identity. They thereby become precariat insurgents, whose presence acts to transform the institutional habitus of their higher education institution and improve rates of engagement and retention.

Who belongs in higher education?

The intersectionality of marginalization and its relevance to achievement within education is evidenced through a critical analysis and comparison of different marginalized experiences of education. This analysis and comparison will specifically consider the role of class and race, as these categories account for some of the most prominent marginalized communities and therefore make up the largest body of research.

While class is often defined in relation to economic brackets and job type, and the British working class has been depicted as white, low-paid, male labourers, this does not reflect the complexities of contemporary British class divisions. As Rogaly and Taylor (2016: 4) argue, 'discussions of working class lives in Britain are too often elided with discussions of whiteness, so that working class black and minority ethnic people in Britain are defined by their ethnic heritage alone'. Because racial inequality

still exists separately to class inequality, such as the black middle class in education (Vincent *et al.*, 2012), this does not assume that class inequality accounts for racial inequality. However, it does reflect the fact that due to institutional racism, black and minority individuals are disproportionately poorer than their white counterparts and although 'race is the modality in which class is lived' (Hall, 1978: 394), for those who encompass both identities, their disadvantage is amplified. Furthermore, mainstream attitudes towards the working classes and ethnic minorities highlight that, aside from their limited access to economic means, key aspects of performative identity, such as their language, mannerisms and style are both culturally appropriated and depicted as less cultured and generally deficient. While cultural appropriation refers to the 'misrepresentation, misuse, and theft of the stories, styles, and material heritage of people who have been historically dominated and remain socially marginalised' (Matthes, 2016: 343), these realities can be evidenced within the fact that urban slang and styles of dress 'are fashionable if you're white and middle class, but thuggish and chavvy if you're anything else' (Marsh, 2016: 1).

The academic failure and uneven engagement of students from marginalized backgrounds is often blamed on cultural deficiency, with engagement in higher education being viewed as a civilizing mission (Loveday, 2015; Reay, 2001). This is particularly apparent within rhetoric around social mobility. In 2014 Peter Brant, the head of policy for the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, claimed that working-class children need to behave more like the middle class if they are to get into the best universities and in turn the highest professions. He said that in order to do so, working-class students need help to change the way they eat, speak and socialize, so that they can fit in (Gevertz, 2014). The realities of the unequal structures that inform this belief are also reflected in the experience of middle-class black students. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), rather than reflect on the reality of racism within education institutes, cultural deficiency exists as a pervasive explanation for the underachievement of ethnic minorities. In response to this, black middle-class parents reported using white middle-class resources, such as styles of speech and ensuring their children dress in a certain way, along with asserting their middle-class professions, in order to limit and resist aspects of discrimination and in turn marginalization (Vincent *et al.*, 2012).

In contrast to theories of cultural deficiency, Bourdieu (1993) argues that different groups' unequal access to cultural capital accounts for the unequal engagement and retention of non-traditional students in education. Cultural capital can be understood as social and cultural structures of a

certain field that infer value on the individual and therefore affect one's social and classed position within society. Cultural capital is acquired through habitus, which Bourdieu defines as the means by which objective conditions of society become inscribed in the dispositions of individuals, through lived experience (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). It is in this sense that certain forms of cultural capital are valued over others. When relating these theories to the field of higher education, Bourdieu argues that success in the education system is facilitated by the possession of a particular kind of cultural capital and habitus (Sullivan, 2002). As a result, when groups that do not fit this form of habitus encounter the unfamiliar field of higher education, different forms of cultural capital come into conflict. This generates ambivalence and anxiety, and also positions them at a disadvantage (Bourdieu, 1993). Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital and educational attainment are evidenced across wide bodies of educational research conducted in the UK.

Experiences of marginalization in Britain are reinforced within the education system from an early age. Reay (2001) argues that a failure to achieve within assessment, due to unequal access to cultural capital, acts to make working-class children feel they are 'nothing', in comparison to their middle-class counterparts. Furthermore, both Willis's (1981) study into working-class educational achievement and Ogbu's (2008) research into black student achievement highlighted that in response to their subordinate position within society and the classroom, and therefore lack of cultural capital, both groups develop a strong counter-school oppositional culture and resistance to academia, which affect students' aspirations and future employment opportunities.

For those non-traditional students who make it into higher education, the relationship between their own habitus and the habitus of higher education institutions affects the type of institutions they choose to attend and their likelihood of having a positive learning experience and successfully completing their studies. This is particularly apparent in relation to the demographics of students and staff, along with the way in which the values and practices of an institution engage these demographics. Within Reay's (2001) study into mature working-class students' higher education choices, she notes that students often turned down places at prestigious institutions, in exchange for 'the safer' option in which they felt the institutional habitus better fit their home habitus. A similar process is highlighted within Bhopal's (2010) research into Asian women in higher education, whereby most chose local universities over more prestigious institutions because they felt they would be better able to form a community of practice, through which they

could overcome various barriers. This belief is supported by Thomas (2002: 438), who argues that higher education institutions that have:

> an institutional habitus that is accepting of difference, and which facilitates greater match with the familial habitus of students from different social and cultural backgrounds goes some way to explain higher rates of student retention.

Teaching and learning practices are an integral aspect of institutional habitus that has been widely associated with the marginalization of non-traditional students. Through the repetition of accepted approaches to pedagogy, certain practices become normatized, and where there is normatization there is marginalization. Normatization and the marginalization it creates results in the formation of the 'pedagogized other', whereby certain students, or communities find themselves alienated and excluded by the pedagogical norms of a discipline and/or institution (Atkinson, 2002). This concept has been further developed by educators and researchers, who have contended that the enduring hegemony of elitism, Eurocentrism and racism works implicitly and at times explicitly to inform pedagogy (Broadhead, 2015; Hatton, 2012).

In response to the marginalization non-traditional students experience in higher education, many develop coping strategies, which include attempts to pass as middle class. These attempts to transform oneself in order to fit in are often unsuccessful and also lead to identity ambivalence. As Reay *et al.* (2010) note, the non-traditional students within their study move across two very different fields: maintaining connections to their social background, while developing middle-class dispositions through compartmentalizing different parts of the self. However, this form of class hybridity does not sit comfortably with a sense of authenticity. Furthermore, while Lehmann (2009) argues that working-class attempts to 'pass as middle class' are likely to be unsuccessful, participants within Vincent *et al.*'s (2011) research into black middle-class parents' encounters with education felt resistant to the title 'middle class', due to their proximity to working-class culture, such as friends, family and their own background, and because they felt they could never truly be accepted as equals by their white middle-class counterparts.

What seems apparent from this body of research is that many of the disqualifying attitudes, practices and structures within society and specifically higher education affect different marginalized groups in similar ways. Not only do these realities directly affect the engagement, retention and attainment of students from marginalized backgrounds, but they frame the parameters of how these issues are perceived and engaged with.

Furthermore, while it is likely that individuals who exist at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities are all the more likely to experience these forms of discrimination, there is a lack of research that explicitly recognizes the importance of intersectionality in relation to the issues previously discussed. It is in relation to this reality that this chapter and the other bodies of research within this book are positioned.

The Open Book Project

For many Open Book Project participants, their past experiences of official institutions have been overwhelmingly negative. From mental health facilities, to prison and welfare services, most interactions were discussed in relation to feelings of alienation and disempowerment. These feelings were also extended to institutions of education. While most participants referred to the authoritarian nature of school and the ways in which they were made to feel inadequate and 'stupid', others who had excelled explained that this had led to them feeling alienated from their peers and even, at times, family. As is the case in previous studies (Ogbu, 2008; Willis, 1981), these experiences resulted in a disengagement from school and the consequent aversion to further education. However, it was in direct contrast to these experiences that new participants interpreted the Open Book Project. Themes of autonomy and parity were particularly central to this understanding.

Engagement with education is often authoritarian. It is fraught with rules and regulations that, when broken, result in disciplinary action. The first instance of this is compulsion in school. According to Meighan, 'based on the current model of compulsory day-detention centre, the school itself is a bully institution. When you take the free will out of education, that turns it into schooling' (referenced Harber, 2004: 21). In recognition of this, Open Book Project drop-in workshops and running courses have an intentionally non-authoritarian structure. Not only do they not require official registration to attend, but students can also decide to attend as little or as much as they feel able. This sets the tone for the emphasis placed on participant autonomy. Autonomy in relation to what and how things are learnt is also central to disrupting the alienation experienced, as a result of authoritarian teaching and learning practices. The hegemonic model of teaching and learning relies on top-down communication and hierarchy. 'What is taught and learned, how it is taught and learned, where it is taught and learned and what the general learning environment is like is not in the hands of pupils' (Harber, 2004: 24). In response to this, although there is a weekly topic led by the workshop facilitator, project participants direct

workshop content and are encouraged to suggest ideas for future weekly topics. Furthermore, based on the groups' enjoyment of a particular theme, or topic, they can choose to spend future weeks exploring it further, or move on. In consequence, while new participants sometimes attend sporadically and can be reluctant to join in, upon realizing they are in control of their own engagement and learning, they become more vocal and begin to attend more regularly.

Equally important to the ethos of the project is parity, by way of relationships among participants and between staff and participants. When considering relationships between participants it is well documented that working-class engagement in education can result in alienation from peers outside of their institution (Loveday, 2015; Reay, 2001; Reay *et al.*, 2009; Willis, 1981). Various new participants within the project expressed this. However, all felt that it was mediated by the forming of friendships with other project participants, who they felt could relate to this experience. Many of the participants who self-referred did so because they knew people who had previously, or who were currently attending the project; while others stated that, although Open Book Project participants came from a range of backgrounds and they may not have come into contact if it weren't for the project, their shared experiences of marginalization positioned them in opposition to mainstream students and staff and enabled them to build close friendships. This is highlighted in the following comment made by Will, a black first-year undergraduate student, during a conversation with a white project staff member:

> I have as much in common with the black students and academics here as you do with the white ones. We grew up on the same estates, got roughed up by the same police. We've been oppressed by the same systems.

A further result of the forming of friendships within the project is the development of communities of practice. According to Wegner (1998), 'communities of practice' can be defined as groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. An example of this is participants' use of the Whatsapp group. The project originally implemented the Whatsapp group in order to relay information, such as room locations. However, on numerous occasions, individuals who have been struggling with personal or academic issues have used the group as a resource to seek support. Upon reaching out via the Whatsapp group, they have received countless messages from friends and even individuals they have never met; some are well-wishers

and others state that they have previously been in the same position and have overcome it. This is often met with a reply of gratitude and a renewed attitude of resilience.

Regarding relationships between participants and staff there is emphasis on staff members being able to relate to participant experiences and on the removal of the traditional hierarchy between student and teacher. This is primarily ensured through regular internal hiring, with most of the core team beginning their journey with the project as students, and all having direct experience of marginalization. This shared experience of marginalization encourages staff to follow a Freirean pedagogy, through humanizing participants rather than approaching them as empty vessels that must be filled with knowledge (Freire, 1993). One of the key methods used to do so is the process of counter-storytelling. The stories and voices of marginalized communities are often ignored and silenced. Counter-storytelling provides a voice for these communities, as it allows them to communicate their experiences and realities, therefore offering 'the potential to unpick truths and frameworks of knowledge that have, in essence become naturalized' (Stevenson, 2015: 129). Participants and staff regularly share personal experiences of their previous struggles, such as addiction, crime, or social marginalization, during drop-in classes, either for creative inspiration or to contextualize and support academic theories. Through transgressing the hierarchical boundaries of student and teacher, these exchanges lead to strong feelings of commonality and relationships of trust. Through this process, participants come to feel that their own interests, knowledge and experiences are not inferior, or in conflict with requirements to engage in higher education.

Although practices such as humanizing participants and counter-storytelling are grounded in approaches to critical pedagogy, all forms of pedagogy still rely on pre-accepted practices and structures. A consequence of the drop-in workshops' emphasis on autonomy and parity is a willingness to veer away from pre-accepted and understood approaches to pedagogy, which opens the space to 'real learning'. According to Atkinson (2013: 2), this approach includes:

> Pedagogies that are not trapped by established methodologies, policies or ways of thinking about and supporting learning, as though we know what learning is, but through responding effectively to the different haecceities of learning we continuously expand our understanding of what learning is or can become. Thus pedagogies against the state relate to learning as a process

> of truth and becoming in contrast to states of being, they are concerned with subjects-yet-to come.

While this is partially due to participants' ability to direct the content and pace of their learning, the expert intuition of workshop facilitators is also partly responsible. Expert intuition is 'practical intuition based on a sensitive, tactical and compassionate model of practice' (McMillan, 2015: 86), in which a safe and open space is maintained, along with a willingness to adapt the planned aspects of the workshop, in relation to the needs of the group. Although most staff members are not trained as teachers, due to the emphasis on staff members having personal experience of marginalization, they draw on their own experience of teaching and learning practices. Furthermore, due to the emphasis on autonomy in relation to attendance, if participants enjoy workshop content and style they will return, while unpopular workshops can cease to run due to low attendance. As a result, workshop facilitators learn what works through trial and error and therefore develop expert intuition.

Once participants have familiarized themselves with the drop-in workshops, they are given the choice of registering on the extended project. While some choose to only attend drop-in workshops, others are keen to return to formal education, in order to develop their academic and/or their artistic skills. The extended project qualification enables participants to do so, through supporting them to complete a 5,000-word essay, or a creative portfolio and research project. On successful completion, the project provides participants with a level 3 accredited qualification, which along with a reference from the project, is often sufficient to ensure progression into higher education.

The prospect of what the extended project may lead to, along with its aspects of normatized pedagogy, such as working to deadlines, developing one's research and ideas in relation to feedback and being formally assessed, along with the resultant level of commitment required, can lead to feelings of fear and reluctance. For this reason, autonomy and parity are re-emphasized through encouraging participants to devise their own deadlines, which they can re-evaluate on a regular basis. Furthermore, participants are free to cover any topic they wish and are also responsible for structuring their own research. During the early stages participants may question their ability and struggle to decide on a chosen topic. At this point comments such as 'I'm not academic' in the context of a written project or 'creative' in the context of a creative portfolio are common. In response to this, participants are encouraged to think about personal experiences and interests and to explore

them from an academic or creative perspective. Often participants settle on a subject that relates to themes of social exclusion, inequality or resistance. Some examples are historical protests and strikes, such as the miners' strikes under Thatcher, questions around prison reform and criminal justice and the ideological role of development and policy. Once participants' final project ideas begin to take shape, their confidence in their own ability and what is required to engage in higher education is transformed.

Through taking part in the extended project, participants are further encouraged to consider precariat identity as complimentary to the field of higher education. This is achieved through combining aspects of normatized pedagogy, within higher education, and aspects of autonomous learning, therefore highlighting how pre-accepted avenues can be utilized to express counter-narratives. Furthermore, in familiarizing oneself with aspects of the normative pedagogy of higher education, as will be discussed in the following section, participants have greater academic preparedness once they progress into higher education.

Engaging in higher education

While Open Book Project participation mitigates many of the barriers to engagement that precariat students' face, once in higher education, the project ceases to be in control of the educational experience. This section will discuss the barriers that Open Book Project participants experience while attending a higher education institution and the extent to which participation in the project enables them to overcome them.

Academic preparedness

All participants involved in this study who had progressed into higher education were currently studying, or had previously completed, a foundation year. Although all were in agreement that the structure was similar to that of the extended project, they also noted that there were key differences, such as a pre-determined curriculum and deadlines. While participants commented that they would have struggled with assessments had they not developed skills such as essay writing and organizing independent study on the extended project, others noted that they would not have been able to meet deadlines and work at the pace expected on their undergraduate course had they not been prepared for it during their foundation course. As a result, participants felt each stage of progression was a little more challenging than the last, and had they gone straight onto an undergraduate course it would have been too difficult, and they would have likely dropped out. As Lee, a second-year undergraduate student stated:

> The foundation made it like a stepladder. If I had to go straight into first year I probably couldn't have done it. The only way I can explain it is the extended project was like cutting my baby teeth. I was completely new to that world. And then the foundation year was like my adult teeth coming in, it was the biggest transition, but now I'm in my second year and I'm just chomping my way through.

The aspects of normative pedagogy embedded within the structure of the extended project and foundation programme are framed within the visible pedagogy of higher education. According to Bernstein, the concept of 'visible pedagogy' includes three rules: hierarchy between teacher and student, the sequencing and pacing of curriculum, and assessment criteria (Broadhead, 2015). Bernstein argues that this privileges middle-class students because it assumes that everyone is equal in knowledge and access to resources, both tangible and immaterial, and that they will learn at the same speed. In response, Bernstein states that interventions such as extra support and a relaxing of sequencing and pacing can act as a delayed repair system. The extended project, followed by a foundation year do this with ascending difficulty, therefore minimizing the level of disadvantage participants experienced when entering their respective courses.

Studying a subject that was on offer within the Open Book Project drop-in workshops, or undertaking an extended project was also particularly beneficial. Students who had done so expressed surprise at their level of knowledge in comparison to the traditional students on their course. Fellow students who had not come through the Open Book Project also supported this opinion. On one occasion during an informal discussion with some Open Book Project participants, a friend who had not come through the project joined them. She stated she wished she had attended the project as she felt there were those that knew much more than her and were already familiar with the university, so seemed to settle in a lot faster and be more vocal in class.

Teaching and learning practices

Although participation in the Open Book Project improves academic preparedness, most participants felt that the normatized pedagogy of higher education continued to position them as the pedagogized other, which meant they were still at a disadvantage when compared to traditional students. One example of this was courses with an emphasis on academic essay writing. Although essay writing is part of the extended project and foundation year, participants felt that their academic writing skills were still not as developed

as that of traditional students. In relation to this point, they referred to the difference in vocabulary between themselves and traditional students, arguing that those who came from middle- or upper-class backgrounds are more familiar with middle-class language, which provides the foundation for academic language. This belief is supported by the sociolinguist Cregan (2008), who argues that educational achievement relates to students' ability to use certain styles and patterns of speech, with working-class students existing at a disadvantage because of the discontinuity between the way they speak at home and what is expected at school. This is exemplified in an incident some of the students recollected, in which a former student had been accused of plagiarism because his essay sounded 'too intellectual' and his teacher said that it was not in keeping with the way he spoke. The participants who recollected this scenario noted that while this reflects the teacher's awareness of the implicit bias of written assignments, it is also an example of discrimination and stereotyping on the part of the teacher.

Although participants were faced with the experience of becoming the pedagogized other, engagement with the project encouraged a sense of resilience. In particular, they felt that instead of 'getting caught up with getting the best grades', it was more important to focus on education for 'learning's sake'. While most felt some frustration, they were aware that it was not a reflection of their deficiency, but instead an indictment of the discriminatory nature of higher education. Rather than feel disillusioned, or personally responsible for their limitations, they focused on their own acquirement of knowledge, as a means to critically engage with their marginalized identity.

As I have explored in relation to existing literature and the Open Book Project's methodology, the way that teaching staff engage with students is central to the inclusive nature of teaching and learning practices. Among participants, attitudes of lecturers and tutors were explicitly noted as having an impact on student experience. While some felt that all the staff in their department were approachable and easy to get along with, others felt that it depended on the individual staff member, with some being actively discriminatory towards non-traditional students. Take the following two statements:

> All my teachers are really helpful. You can go an' knock on their door whenever an' they'll make time for you. Sometimes I know I need help, but I don't know what with. Sometimes it's good to just go an' have a chat. (Jane, first-year undergraduate student)

> They think they're open minded, but it gets really annoying always being singled out as the token working-class person. Sometimes I'm treated like a spokesperson for working-class Britain ... [other times] it's like my point of view isn't taken seriously. (Kevin, first-year undergraduate student)

Kevin, who made the second comment, has since dropped out of his course. He and others like him are examples of the fact that even with the resilience that Open Book Project participation instils, discourteous relationships between staff and students can still adversely affect student retention. In contrast, the presence of a supportive member of staff can have the opposite effect. All except Kevin had at least one member of staff in their department who they could go to for help. Another student, for example, also considered dropping out due to health issues that caused them to miss a period of study. However, a supportive member of staff was able to persuade them to stay.

Aside from a few members of staff who were either from, or had direct experience of marginalization, and were prepared to humanize students (Freire, 1993), most participants spoke of the limitations they felt when communicating with lecturers and course leaders, due to a lack of parity. They felt that when it came to extra-curricular issues they could not confide in most staff members out of fear that they would be judged or it would be perceived as inappropriate. This often resulted in self-censoring and not asking for support when needed. This is exemplified in issues that Abraham, a foundation-year student, had:

> I had some personal problems, but they [departmental staff] wouldn't understand. I didn't want them to look at me different. You know, judge me an' stuff. So I didn't say nothing.

Instead, Abraham and other students who voiced similar concerns confided in someone from the Open Book Project. Open Book Project staff were then able to speak to members of staff within the student's department and mediate the situation.

Social fit

While all participants referred to the support the Open Book Project offered in ensuring they had a 'community of practice' (Wegner, 1998) around them, the number of non-traditional students participants engaged with outside of the project largely affected to what extent they felt they fitted in, as Kyle, a second-year undergraduate student, put it:

> There's a considerable age gap, but I feel like I get on with them well. I was surprised how many non-traditional students there are, ones that hadn't come through Open Book.

Those participants who acknowledged their department had a high intake of non-traditional students not only felt they had the most positive engagement with other students outside of the project, but they were the same individuals who noted the prominence of inclusive teaching and learning practices within their departments. This experience is reminiscent of Thomas's (2002) research into the relationship between inclusive institutional habitus and non-traditional student engagement; however, it is taking place on a departmental level, rather than at the institutional level.

Although students reported that studying within departments that had an inclusive institutional habitus led to increased feelings of belonging, the difference in habitus between participants and traditional students meant that over half of the project participants interviewed also felt alienated from peers within their departments. As Robert, a second-year student, put it:

> For me this place is divided into two groups of people, those that say 'innit' and those that say 'do you not think so?'. If I meet the second type I know straight away we probably don't have much in common. Saying that, a lot of people think it's cool to use London slang, but it's fake. They're the worst kind.... It's like I'm too real for them, so it makes them uncomfortable.

While a lack of social fit initially knocked the confidence of new students, once further along on their course they seemed more resilient. Contrast the following comment made by Abraham, a foundation-year student, and a social media post made by Lee, a second-year student:

> I've noticed that students with more money, the ones that speak properly, seem a lot more confident. I wish I could be like that. They have invited me out after class, but I always say no. I'm not confident enough to socialize outside of class, but I'm sure once I settle in that will change. (Abraham)

> The difference between me and most other people at university – They have been indoctrinated into an education system that has made them feel empowered over their 'uneducated' counterparts. I have come to education seeking answers to the many questions that living life has left me with, looking to empower my 'uneducated counterparts'.... You may think this

> is divisive, but current research shows that I am part of the most under-represented social group on campuses across Britain. This means that I must make my voice louder and clearer so that it is heard. If that means being antagonistic there is nothing wrong with that. (Lee)

While the initial shock of the disjuncture between their precariat habitus and the field of higher education caused students in less inclusive departments to experience feelings of ambivalence and anxiety, as was the case with Abraham, through engaging with staff and students from the Open Book Project, as well as developing relationships with other 'non-traditional' students through involvement in extra-curricular groups, such as the student union, societies and mentoring networks, students were reassured that an academic disposition could sit comfortably within a precariat habitus. As a result, rather than resort to mimicry of the cultural capital of traditional students, or compartmentalize various aspects of their identity, as in Reay *et al.*'s (2010) research, they were emboldened to assert their marginalized identity, in opposition to that of traditional students, seemingly regardless of how they were perceived. In doing so, participants maintained pride in their precariat habitus and felt it their place to act as vanguard for the under-represented within their institution, policing those that are guilty of snobbery, or cultural appropriation.

Precariat insurgency

In response to enduring trends of unequal access to education across international educational contexts, in a variety of settings, theorists have argued that rather than indoctrinating students into a set of prescribed dispositions, which are bounded to conservative traditions of practice and knowledge, and act to exclude non-traditional students; a truly inclusive education system incorporates inclusive teaching and learning practices that allow students to understand and challenge how traditions of practice and knowledge are constructed. As an educational practitioner, and father of critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire (1993: 13–14) believed:

> There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the 'practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

This philosophy not only aims to improve inclusivity and equal access to education, but also hopes that through doing so it can improve society. Those who believe in the emancipatory possibilities of education argue that if we wish to encourage a peaceful and democratic society, one in which people truly have equal access, representation and the ability to engage in society, societal institutions must reinforce these goals both structurally and ideologically (Harber, 1995). This chapter has highlighted that, unfortunately, higher education in Britain often fails to do so. It is in relation to these failings and critical approaches to improving inclusivity in higher education, and in turn social justice, that the Open Book Project is positioned.

Engagement with the project begins with drop-in workshops, where the emphasis on autonomy and parity assures newcomers that they are not entering into an authoritarian system, in which they will be expected to transform themselves in conformity to hegemonic values and expectations. While staff use their expert intuition to encourage real learning, the development of communities of practice with other project participants, who share the same habitus, provides a support system, thereby creating a safe space within an unfamiliar setting.

Progression into the Open Book Project extended project continues to embed a desire to maintain authenticity, through actively encouraging participants to utilize their personal experiences and interests as academic and creative inspiration, while also improving academic preparedness by familiarizing participants with the normatized pedagogy of higher education. Further to this, both the extended project and the foundation year work as a delayed repair system, by way of reducing the disparity in access and mastery of forms of normatized pedagogy, between non-traditional and traditional students, on entry into higher education.

Through developing academic preparedness, while also maintaining pride in their othered identity, Open Book Project participants are equipped to strive in the face of adversity. Through succeeding regardless of the discriminatory aspects of their academic institutions habitus, they come to reject the classed cultural hegemony of higher education and work towards transforming the habitus of others, rather than themselves. However, participation in the project alone is not enough to ensure an enjoyable learning experience, or successful retention. Successful retention requires the resilience that is encouraged through participation in the project, along with a commitment on the part of the higher education institution and individual departments, to embed an inclusive institutional habitus.

For those departments that have been willing to build an inclusive institutional habitus there is a dialectical process taking place. While increased student diversity informs inclusive teaching and learning practices, inclusive teaching and learning practices of such departments also encourage engagement and retention of non-traditional students. As a result, the Open Book Project not only encourages the precariat to engage with higher education, but in doing so, it creates an ongoing community of precariat insurgents, whose presence and refusal to shy away from their marginalized identity transforms the institutional habitus from within, therefore improving inclusivity and retention. Through doing so, the project and those who graduate from it bring different worlds into contact, while at once limiting the disparity between both groups' cultural capital, thereby challenging the structures that constitute some sections of society as marginalized.

References

Atkinson, D. (2002) *Art in Education: Identity and practice*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Atkinson, D. (2013) 'The blindness of education to the "untimeliness" of real learning'. Paper presented at the School of Social Science and Public Policy, King's College London. Online. www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/education/web-files2/JBurke-Symposium-/Dennis-Atkinson.pdf (accessed 6 September 2018).

Bourdieu, P. (1993) *Sociology in Question*. Trans. Nice, R. London: SAGE Publications.

Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.-C. (1977) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. Trans. Nice, R. London: SAGE Publications.

Broadhead, S. (2015) 'Inclusion in the arts and design curriculum: Revisiting Bernstein and "class" issues'. In Hatton, K. (ed.) *Towards an Inclusive Arts Education*. London: Trentham Books, 138–52.

Cregan, Á. (2008) *From Difference to Disadvantage: "Talking posh": Sociolinguistic perspectives on the context of schooling in Ireland* (Combat Poverty Agency Working Paper 07/03). Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency. Online. www.combatpoverty.ie/publications/workingpapers/2007-03_WP_TalkingPosh.pdf (accessed 6 September 2018).

Freire, P. (1993) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Trans. Ramos, M.B. Rev. ed. New York: Continuum.

Gevertz, J. (2014) 'Working-class students: "There's a constant feeling you don't belong"'. *Guardian*, 25 March. Online. www.theguardian.com/education/mortarboard/2014/mar/25/working-class-students-russell-group-universities-unwelcome (accessed 6 September 2018).

Harber, C. (ed.) (1995) *Developing Democratic Education*. Ticknall: Education Now.

Harber, C. (ed.) (2004) *Schooling as Violence: How schools harm pupils and societies*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Hatton, K. (2012) 'Considering diversity, change and intervention: How the higher education curriculum looked in on itself'. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 13 (1), 34–50.

HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) (2001) *Strategies for Widening Participation in Higher Education: A guide to good practice*. Online. http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100303191253/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2001/01_36/01_36.pdf (accessed June 2017).

Hill Collins, P. (2015) 'Intersectionality's definitional dilemmas'. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 41, 1–20.

Holland-Gilbert, J. (2016) 'Bridging the gap: Encouraging the precariat into higher education'. Retain, Achieve, Succeed research programme. Internal University of the Arts Research. Online. www.arts.ac.uk/about-ual/diversity/ras-research-programme/research--publications/ (accessed 6 September 2018).

Lehmann, W. (2009) 'Becoming middle class: How working-class university students draw and transgress moral class boundaries'. *Sociology*, 43 (4), 631–47.

Loveday, V. (2015) 'Working-class participation, middle-class aspiration? Value, upward mobility and symbolic indebtedness in higher education'. *Sociological Review*, 63 (3), 570–88.

Marsh, G. (2016) 'Working class appropriation is the new cool'. *Epigram*, 27 April. Online. https://epigram.org.uk/2016/04/27/working-class-appropriation-is-the-new-cool/ (accessed 2 September 2018).

Matthes, E.H. (2016) 'Cultural appropriation without cultural essentialism?'. *Social Theory and Practice*, 42 (2), 343–66.

McMillan, M. (2015) 'Pedagogy of the workshop: An "expert-intuitive" practice'. In Hatton, K. (ed.) *Towards an Inclusive Arts Education*. London: Trentham Books, 78–97.

OFFA (Office for Fair Access) (2014) *Trends in Young Participation by Student Background and Selectivity of Institution*. Bristol: Office for Fair Access. Online. http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/19304/1/OFFA-2014.01.pdf (accessed 6 September 2018).

OFFA (Office for Fair Access) (2017) *Outcomes of Access Agreement Monitoring for 2015–16*. Bristol: Office for Fair Access. Online. http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/29489/1/OFFA-Monitoring-Outcomes-Report-2015-16-Final.pdf (accessed 6 September 2018).

Ogbu, J.U. (ed.) (2008) *Minority Status, Oppositional Culture, and Schooling*. New York: Routledge.

Reay, D. (2001) 'Finding or losing yourself? Working-class relationships to education'. *Journal of Education Policy*, 16 (4), 333–46.

Reay, D., Crozier, G. and Clayton, J. (2010) '"Fitting in" or "standing out": Working-class students in UK higher education'. *British Educational Research Journal*, 36 (1), 107–24.

Rogaly, B. and Taylor, B. (2009) *Moving Histories of Class and Community: Identity, place and belonging in contemporary England*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Savage, M. (2015) *Social Class in the 21st Century*. London: Pelican.

Savage, M. and Devine, F. (2013) 'The Great British Class Survey – results'. *BBC Science*, 3 April. Online. www.bbc.co.uk/science/0/21970879 (accessed 6 September 2018).

Solórzano, D.G. and Yosso, T.J. (2002) 'Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research'. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8 (1), 23–44.

Standing, G. (2011) *The Precariat: The new dangerous class*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Stevenson, C. (2015) 'Identity, research and the arts curriculum: Counter storytelling as academic practice'. In Hatton, K. (ed.) *Towards an Inclusive Arts Education*. London: Trentham Books, 119–37.

Sullivan, A. (2002) 'Bourdieu and education: How useful is Bourdieu's theory for researchers?'. *Netherlands Journal of Social Sciences*, 38 (2), 144–66.

Thomas, L. (2002) 'Student retention in higher education: The role of institutional habitus'. *Journal of Education Policy*, 17 (4), 423–42.

UN (United Nations) (n.d.) 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights'. Online. www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/ (accessed 6 September 2018).

Vincent, C., Rollock, N., Ball, S. and Gillborn, D. (n.d.) *The Educational Strategies of the Black Middle Classes: Project summary*. London: Institute of Education.

Vincent, C., Rollock, N., Ball, S. and Gillborn, D. (2012) 'Intersectional work and precarious positionings: Black middle-class parents and their encounters with schools in England'. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 22 (3), 259–76.

Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of Practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Willis, P. (1981) *Learning to Labour: How working class kids get working class jobs*. New York: Columbia University Press.