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Diversity and social integration on higher education campuses in India and the UK: student and staff perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports findings from the first year of a UK-India Education and Research Initiative (UKIERI), 'Widening Participation: Diversity, isolation or integration in Higher Education?' Over a three year period this project will explore issues of diversity and integration, social cohesion and separation, equality and discrimination as experienced by students and staff on higher education (HE) campuses in India and the UK. Initial findings suggest that separation of groups on the HE campuses studied is pervasive and ubiquitous. While some such separation may be for supportive reasons, convenience, or inertia, at other times it is due to overt discrimination on the grounds of race, region, nationality, caste, class, religion, age or gender. However, most respondents said that greater integration was both desirable and possible.

Keywords: higher education; diversity; integration; India; UK; widening participation

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Introduction

This UKIERI-funded three-year collaborative research project on widening participation in HE, between academics in India and the UK, covers five different HE institutions, two in the Mumbai area of India and three in England. The project is primarily concerned with the experiences of diverse students and staff regarding equality and discrimination, community and separation within current market oriented and globalised HE environments. Its main aims are to explore issues of diversity and integration, social cohesion and separation, equality and discrimination as experienced by students and staff on HE campuses in India and the UK, especially from the perspectives of minority, under-represented and disadvantaged students.

The early stages of this research explored the ways in which staff and students experience integration, separation and potential discrimination on HE campuses. As Gundara (2000:90) notes, there may be

'institutional customs, practices and procedures which overtly and covertly discriminate against students from racially and culturally different backgrounds.'

Subsequent work focuses on institutional structures, mission statements, and effective targets and strategies for change that are indicated by the campus experiences of both students and staff.

Context

There are similarities and differences between UK and India on equality issues in education but both countries share fundamental governmental concerns about improving access to higher education, inclusion of minorities and equality.

India's constitution outlaws discrimination: between men and women, castes, regions and religions. It's chief architect, Ambedkar, dalit by birth and Buddhist by conversion, spent much of his life fighting against caste discrimination and for the rights of women (Keer, 1971). He was one of the first untouchables to go to university, and this occurred in the city of Mumbai (formerly Bombay), the location of our responding HE institutions. Ambedkar championed the introduction of reservations in Indian schools, colleges and workplaces for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). This policy continues today, 60 years on, despite at the time being considered a temporary measure to eradicate socio-economic inequalities, and to build a secular society with a common social code based on social democracy (Keer, 1971).

Indian National Plans for Education (NPE) focus on 'equality, common culture and national integration', and position education as a vehicle for change, yet the social distance between rich and poor, different castes and rural and urban populations remains large (Joshee, 2003:286). The caste reservations system was extended to 50 per cent in 1989 and resulted in massive protests by general category students and their families, and was resolved only by the further expansion of HE places available for those students as well (Nilekani, 2008:332). While official policies seek a cohesive and equitable common culture amongst India's diverse population differences persist, most commonly in language, religion, region, caste and class. Rapid expansion of the Indian economy over recent years has led to a growth of individualism amongst the young that does not lend itself to 'service to the

community' (Joshee, 2003:288), a core element of India's NPE's. Hindu revivalism under the BJP (Bhartiya Janata Party) does not help either. Gundara (2000:166) argues that by privileging Hindu discourse the BJP has 'helped undermine the secular polity of the last decade', and that this also undermines the secularity of Indian education.

The Indian HE sector has undergone rapid expansion in recent years, with 214 universities, 38 deemed universities and 9703 colleges functioning in 2008 and many more to follow. India's eleventh five year plan has recently increased spending on education from 7.7 per cent to 19 per cent of the budget, and raised HE expenditure to just over 1 per cent of GDP (Nilekani, 2008:341). This is important since student fees account for just 5 per cent of Indian HE budgets.

Despite lacking a written constitution the UK has extensive equal rights legislation, individual freedom and democratic values (House of Commons, 2008) in many ways similar to those of India, although positive discrimination in favour of minority or disadvantaged groups, such as India's reservations system, is against the law. Higher education in the UK has expanded rapidly over the past 30 years: from an elite system available to perhaps 10 per cent of the population, the proportion of 18 to 30-year-olds going into higher education has now reached 44% with a government target set at 50% by 2010 (DfES 2003). Unlike India, this expansion has been funded by shifting many of the costs of HE from the state to students, from maintenance grants to fees and loans, although there remain means tested grants and bursaries for the most needy (DfES 2004). Whilst UK government policies promote wider access to HE there remain significant differences in access and outcomes for minority, disadvantaged and under-represented groups (e.g. Bowers-Brown, 2006). There has been a steady increase in the number of international students: with recruitment

targets set since 1999, and UK universities have become increasingly dependent on international student fee income to supplement state funding (Lunt, 2008). Now more than 8% of the total income of UK universities comes from international (non-EU) student fees (Ramsden, 2008).

What individual HE institutions in both countries share is the challenge of turning equality and diversity principles and policies, ubiquitous in their mission statements, into effective practice.

Rationale

Our starting point, as sociologists and educationalists, was that for students to develop and grow in social and academic HE contexts that are increasingly international, multilingual, global, multicultural and interdependent, it is necessary for them to acquire, and appreciate possession of, intercultural skills and knowledge. To this end it is important that HE participants and their institutional environments model academic and social interactions that support the integration of diverse, disadvantaged and minority groups and promote social cohesiveness.

'The cultural diversity of the modern university provides us with rich opportunities to learn about each other. Such learning cannot only prepare students to cope in a world that is multicultural and interdependent (OECD, 2004) but can also ensure that academics operate beyond local and national perspectives.' (Hyland et al, 2008:3)

Unfortunately, this is rarely achieved (Hyland et al 2008). Our own informal observations on HE campuses suggest extensive and continued separation of different groups of students, and that opportunities for cross-cultural/ intercultural learning are being missed.

The development of work-related intercultural skills is an important function of HE, but, we believe more importantly, HE is also about enhancing social justice through greater knowledge, understanding and respect for similarities and differences between people with different backgrounds, experience and cultures, and treating them all as equally important. In other words, there is a moral as well as a practical purpose to education. Giroux (2005) amongst others notes ‘the civil obligations of the academy’, and that pedagogy is a ‘moral practice’. He argues that educators must:

‘... defend critical education, help students come to terms with their own power as individuals and social agents, and reclaim those non-market values such as caring, community, trust, conviction and courage that are vital to a substantive democracy’

(Giroux, 2005:3)

Moral arguments such as Giroux’s support the promotion of intercultural learning in HE, for non-economic related reasons. We take the view that intercultural learning is particularly important for home-based, majority or ‘traditional’ HE students, whatever their racial and social origins, backgrounds or past experiences, not least because so-called ‘international’, minority and ‘non-traditional’ students are, by definition, already doing it, by immersing themselves in educational systems and cultures with which they are unfamiliar.

The lack of integration on HE campuses, between students from diverse cultures, backgrounds, races and religions, is evident in the literature (UKCOSA, 2004; Carroll and Ryan, 2005; Hyland et al, 2008; Deakins, 2009). Disadvantaged, minority or under-represented students are recorded as feeling marginalised (Read et al, 2003), isolated (Furnham, 1997; Daniel, 2009), invisible (Coram, 2009) and excluded (Hockings et al, 2008).

Such experiences can derive from discrimination or mistreatment on the basis of group differences, such as skin colour, religion, nationality, gender etc. but they are also exclusionary and harmful in terms of individual's feelings of equal worth and belonging, of being treated with equal respect and of being valued as members of the shared HE community. These students can feel powerless, like outsiders in a strange place, and even that HE is not the right place for them to be.

While there has been relatively 'little research into the complexities of intercultural encounters and communication' in HE environments' (Daniel, 2009; Hyland et al, 2008:6; Pelletier, 2003) there is a substantial body of work regarding the experiences of different groupings of students (for example, Quinn, 2003, on women; Reay et al, 2005, and Archer, 2000, on class; Mirza, 2005, Bailey, 2003, and Panesar, 2003 on race and ethnicity; Wankhede, 2002, on caste; Pickerden, 2002, and Ahmed, 2001, on religion; Thomas and Quinn, 2007, on first generation entrants; Borland and James, 1999, Riddell, Tinklin, and Wilson, 2005, and Hall and Healey, 2004, on disability; Bowl, 2003, and Tett, 2004, on mature ethnic minority students).

There are many ways in which groups form, and the criterion of membership varies too. Students in groups that can be classified according to nation, race, first language, sex and age, for example, are omnipresent in both social and academic locations on many HE campuses. As Hyland et al (2008:1-2) note, we have a long way to go 'in encouraging some students to break out of their familiar cultural groups to socialise cross-culturally'.

It is indeed common, if not inevitable, in education as in wider society, that 'like gravitates towards like'. Bloom (2008: 42), reporting a study of 1500 secondary school pupils, notes that while school friendship groups were more diverse than out-of-school ones, 'Friendship circles were clearly divided by sex', and that 'Most pupils

prefer to spend time with people from the same ethnic group'. Hyland et al's (2008:21) HE research parallels these findings; it identified "cultural cliques", where similar cultures and nations had a tendency to socialise together.... because it was easier to do so'.

'...it's not about rudeness or about people disliking each other, it's just the natural groups that people tend to form with people from their own countries.' (Home Student, [Hyland et al, 2008, 21](#))

Where students (and staff) share cultural histories, values, experiences and expectations, not to mention language or religion, it is understandable that they would gravitate towards each other, but it should not be to the exclusion or detriment of others or their own education and social experiences.

However, when groups act and present themselves to others in mono-cultural groupings they can be seen as representative of others with similar or the same characteristics. This can lead to stereotyping (positive or negative) especially if there are no counter representatives or inter-cultural encounters that might challenge simplistic stereotypes and demonstrate the more realistic complexity and diversity that exists within groups as well as between them. Mono-cultural groupings mask the complexity of their group members identities, their individual differences and what are likely to be their genuinely hybrid identities.

The literature suggests that intercultural mixing, learning, understanding, competence and communication frequently do not happen despite the opportunities afforded within HE (Ledwith and Seymour, 2001; Carroll and Ryan, 2005). As Hyland et al (2008:5) note, it requires 'effort being made by learners and teachers to effect such a process', that there is a need for some facilitation, perhaps even engineering, through the incorporation of intercultural learning and mixing into the

structures, functions, content and pedagogy of HE provision, both academic and social.

'Academic institutions... may need to take measures which diminish cultural distances between different groups and improve institutional access for students from the marginalised groups.' (Gundara, 2000:88)

We adopt a socio-cultural rather than psychological or therapeutic approach hence our location within a social-constructivist perspective (Moore, 2000). This perspective allows us to develop and enhance our understandings of aspects of the HE environment that impact upon individuals and their dispositions, and which shape (not determine) their reactions to the human diversity that they encounter on campus. It facilitates our understanding of their perceptions, and our ability to explore the relationship (or not) between these perceptions and individuals actual actions, reactions and interactions in HE.

Sample

Five HE institutions are involved in this project, two from India and three from the UK (see Table 1, below). In the first phase data were obtained from just four HE institutions due to difficulties in obtaining willing respondents.

(table 1 here)

The participating institutions were chosen because of their accessibility, but they also represent some important and contrasting features of HE institutions in India and UK and thus enable access to a range of potentially different experiences on campuses. Both Indian institutions are located in the suburbs of Mumbai, India's commercial heart and most populous cosmopolitan city. Untypical of India as a whole their location does however provide an insight into experiences of diversity and

integration in a relatively affluent region that is economically vibrant, outward facing and subject to substantial inward migration from other Indian states. One is relatively large and diverse, the other relatively small and specialised, both have 50 per cent reservation quotas: the larger one based on caste, the smaller one based on region.

The UK institutions are more spread out, two in the north of England, one in the south. All three are located in urban conurbations, two in major cities, one a large town; two have a broad mix of courses and highly diverse student populations despite one being a chartered university and the other a former polytechnic; the third and smallest institution, is more specialised and, like its Mubai counterpart, is based on a religious foundation. Whilst in no way representative this sample did enable us to access campus experiences regarding diversity and integration across a range of different types of HE institution in both countries.

Methodology

Students and staff, in each institution, were initially invited to keep a record (written and photographic, over four weeks) of their experiences on campus in social and academic contexts. They were asked to record what they felt were significant or informative events in relation to student and staff diversity. Ninety record keepers were sought but not readily acquired. Difficulties in obtaining respondents for projects concerned with diversity, equality and integration have been acknowledged by others (McDowell and Marples, 2001; Pelletier, 2003; Johnston, 2007; Hyland et al, 2008).

To gain the necessary sample supplementary and alternative methods were adopted, whilst at the same time retaining and including data gained from the successfully recruited diarists. In effect we adopted a mixed approach (encompassing the use of different and additional research tools). Focus groups and group interviews

plus some individual interviews (see Appendix 1) were offered where there had been few diary respondents (all HEs bar SHEC) and our target sample (90) was virtually achieved: ultimately 88 respondents were recruited for the first phase of our research (of which three data sets were incomplete or not relevant: see Table 2 below).

(table 2 here)

The focus group/ interview questions (Appendix 1) reflect the guidance offered to diarists, and sought to access respondents experiences on campus, in social and academic settings, in relation to student and staff diversity. By including informal as well as formal campus experiences we sought insights into any aspects of HE institutional environments that might inhibit or enhance the integration of diverse groups of students (Tinto, 1993), and the intercultural learning experiences thus afforded to them. Such insights could be used to guide and inform institutional and pedagogic strategies for change.

Despite not being as originally planned, our adoption of a mixed methods approach can potentially be viewed as a strength. The additional methods facilitated access to a wider range and increased number of potential respondents through a mix of random and purposeful sampling. In addition, variation of methods enabled us to avoid over reliance on “joiners” who could potentially bias the sample (Johnston, 2007). Interestingly, the initial sample of diarists were found not to have substantially different views from those involved in the subsequent focus groups and interviews. The themes and issues that run through each data set are strikingly similar.

Initial Findings

Our data suggest commonality of experience amongst academics, support staff and students, in both the Indian and UK HE institutions studied, regarding diversity and

integration on their campuses, albeit with some variation in emphasis between the institutions that took part. Divisions around caste are prominent in India, especially at IDU, while divisions at SHEC are more frequently region and socio-economically based. This in large part reflects their different reservations systems. Divisions in the UK, especially at NSS, tend to focus on race and nationality, and at NNC on international students. Recognising the different characteristics of the HE institutions (see Table 1) and our participants (see Table 2) helps to explain these variations, given their different missions, enrolment policies and ultimately the constitution of their student bodies.

The two smaller institutions, NNC (UK) and SHEC (India), with samples drawn entirely from trainee teachers, experience a greater sense of integration than the two larger HEIs, and they indicate a wider variety of social areas where integration occurs. This could be because they are potentially more cohesive in terms of developing professional orientations and values amongst their students as a key part of their course programmes; alternatively it may be due to their smaller size. Either way, diary, focus group and interview data all comment on key aspects of campus life, namely:

1. people and their attitudes,
2. places where people meet,
3. the teaching experienced,
4. the structures that affect their HE life.

Each of these areas is discussed in turn.

People and their attitudes

Respondents reported that groups based on race or region, caste and class, religion, gender, age, and course studied are a feature of student life on all of the HE campuses studied. Such tendencies are not unexpected and do not necessarily lead to isolation. However there is also evidence that separation and isolation does result from some of these groupings:

While being asked to participate in any activity, everyone wants to stick to their own groups. The sense of comfort within their own people is so strong that they don't even allow any one to come any closer to the group. (SHEC - Indira student diary)

People feel safer in their own social groups, which is why you're getting ghettos forming, because people like to be together, people who are from the same religious and cultural backgrounds, otherwise they feel isolated.(NSS - Interview 8: White British group)

In the UK the groupings most often mentioned were race and ethnicity, whereas students in India most often talked about regional and caste differences. In both countries these issues were often accompanied by references to language differences.

If you look round at the moment now, in the café, and you see people, all the races, black races, white and oriental, they still tend to stick with themselves (NSS – Tibetan, Interview 6)

So when I look at grouping, it's based on class, ...caste based or language based so the major, major thing is that one I think, it's rare to find a group which is different caste. (IDU- Negasi FG1)

The references to caste at IDU were usually linked with the reservation policy, although this was not the case at SHEC. There were clear concerns expressed by some IDU students that being of reservation caste, which appeared to be widely known, could result in inequitable treatment, regardless of the academic ability that they may display.

I am a post- metric scholarship holder so people come to me and said that you are lucky, you are getting free education here and a scholarship also. Anytime you can get money. So such kind of things are very bad to hear... they are ignoring my talent. They still think I am in (reserved) category. (Madhu, IDU - FG2)

Teaching staff can both encourage inclusiveness and accentuate differences.

Very inclusive of all class..... I noticed that the lecturers have to ask the more accented students to repeat things and they do – our lecturers are patient and sometimes it takes two or three go's to understand meaning. (NSS- Student diary)

I found in the class that professors would like to interact with those who are more knowledgeable, who are sophisticated, who are articulate rather than those who are lagging behind them [vernacular/ rural/lower caste]. They would not pay attention to those and even they do not care for them. (IDU -Rashi FG1)

Places where people meet

A variety of places where both integration and separation occurred were identified: halls of residence, hostels, dining areas, bars and other social meeting places. Halls were seen by some as helpful in encouraging integration:

I think halls are quite good in the sense that you do have a mixture of people and you get to know different people from different backgrounds or from different places.(NSS- Interview 1: Mixed ethnicity, British)

However, living accommodation was seen as a source of separation by many students in both UK and India (except SHEC where students do not have hostel accommodation):

There is clear cut division and even when administration allots hostels then there is groupism clearly seen. If you see the room allotments most of the people allotted the same room or same hostel are from a particular category or particular caste. (IDU-Madhu FG2)

Speaker 1: And they also bung them [International Students] all in [Hall X] they're never on [Hall Y], they're never at [Hall Z] ... So that's where like all the internationals go... (NNC - Male Yr 3 FG)

Eating and drinking areas were also places where segregation was observed:

[At the Student Union Bar] I think it's because you've got so many different types of people in one place, they end up segregating themselves into different groups, and where you get segregated groups you get conflicts between groups of people. That's what happens here I think. I'm not saying I've experienced it, but you do notice it.(NSS- Interview 10: Mixed Nationalities).

... in the Dining Hall a clear pattern... SC students dine together and hardly any students from the unreserved categories dine with SC students on a regular basis. (IDU- Kuljit Staff diary)

There were a few positive comments about places for eating and drinking from students from India but no similar comments were made by UK students. Lecture halls were places where a lot of separation was observed:

The most amazing part is although lots of people come after us their seats are reserved by their friends... Even though sometime we sit on the seats shamelessly,

curt looks and glances make us shunt back, although we hate to be back benchers- not belonging to a group takes its toll on us. (SHEC - Indira student diary)

When you're in a lecture room... white students will be in one row and if anybody tries to you know, sit with them there would be a really bad atmosphere, and it's vice versa with the black students, and it's quite sad to see that actually...(NSS- Interview 6: Tibetan female)

Teaching experienced

The use of English as the principle medium of instruction (in all the participating HEIs) was commented on by many as a barrier to understanding and as a cause of division and separation. Despite some references to integration there were numerous examples of problems resulting from language differences. Students from all HEIs, except NNC, remarked on this issue. However, the ethnic profile and low percentage of international students there may have been the reason for the lack of comment at NNC

The Chinese students tended to speak to each other first, before addressing me, and were less confident in speaking English... one of the reasons for taking this course is to integrate with other students and it is a pity if a student feels isolated from the rest of the group.... (NSS- Alex Staff diary)

Isolation is found between some student teachers of B.Ed Class due to language problems.(SHEC- Madhur Staff diary)

^...most of the SC and ST Students fail to participate in the discussion thinking that their English is not as good as that of the unreserved category students.(IDU - Kuljit staff diary)

Language differences were discussed at some length in the IDU focus groups and a variety of different issues emerged: student-student interaction difficulties and isolation; difficulties in making friends, in understanding lectures and in taking part in discussion, as well as teachers sometimes discriminating against students whose English is not good.

Group work seemed to lead either to improved integration or to increased separation depending upon how it was organised: where students chose for themselves which group they would be part of there was evidence of separation into the type of groups indicated above, but when the groups were chosen by the staff positive interactions took place and there was more integration. UK students and staff commented most about group work, possibly because it is used less frequently in India.

... you find at least once a term there's a group activity... you're forced into a situation to work with people that you don't know and on our course they tend to be, they're very mixed, you know... and personally it's been fine. (NSS- Interview 5: White British group)

Today the college organized one "Poster competition"... All the students have to participate compulsorily. All the students were divided into groups of four. ... It was a nice thing that everybody participated in the competition and all were cheerful and busy. There was a very healthy ambience... (SHEC - Deepa student diary)

Where students and staff referred to separation it was evident in many cases that the groupings were chosen by the students.

..when you are black most blacks would be on their own. So most of the time... it was very difficult to be in a group, in a mixed group you understand, so people tended to be in groups that are race sort of related. (NSS Int 7)

During class group task 12 students were told to split into 2 groups... After 5 minutes there was a definite split and the group was divided into 3 and 9. Interestingly the group of 3 were ethnic minority and 8 out of the 9 were home students. (NSS- Pam Staff diary)

Structures affecting HE life

In both the UK and India special events were commented on by students as either encouraging integration or as divisive. Those mentioned by UK students were organised by the Student Union or by individual societies and were frequently perceived to be potentially discouraging of integration.

And they have like Asian music nights... it gets my back up to be honest... Why not call it just a music night... they've got their Asian music night, it's just total segregation. (NSS- Interview 10: Mixed Nationalities)

They stick to the International Society. Yeah, and that's it. (NNC- Male, Yr 3 FG)

At the Fresher's Fair there's always like the Sikh community and there's the Caribbean community, and they have their stalls and their stands to educate people about their cultures, but it's only like Caribbean people who will go and join that society and take part. It's a bit like you feel a bit stupid walking over. (NSS- Interview 10: Mixed Nationalities)

But special events could also be helpful in integration.

For example the Sikh society did a charity football tournament, and there was loads of different people there. That was one where everyone just got together..., it was for a good cause as well. (NSS- Interview 2: British Indian and Pakistani)

I and [another girl] have started bonding well. Because of the dance competition we came to know each other well (SHEC - Latika student diary)

... there was a community radio centre where the people come together and sit together. ... if you have community radio event, or more of the events where you can come and talk, is the thing which can dissolve the barrier. (IDU - Amresh FG1)

Some specific course provisions also seemed to encourage integration:

I have found the equalities and ethnic diversity modules helpful in opening up the difficulties experienced by international students. (NSS- Susan student diary)

The course curriculum helps me a lot because group lab, where they have taught to take humans as human beings, this makes it easy to adjust. (IDU- Rupesh FG2)

Some students at IDU found that special English classes were helpful, while others felt that perhaps these would be more effective if they were better organised:

[A friend] is taking English class because she is not well in English. But there is no further improvement in her fluency... classes should be organized in a proper manner, not only for name sake that ok we have English classes, but there should be proper presentation of students and professors as well as attendance must be updated.(IDU- Rashi FG1)

At SHEC, where students could choose one of a number of instructional languages post admission, including English, there were fewer references to language difficulties.

All the teaching staff of our college are very supportive and co-operative. They always ensure that every student understands the lesson well...Most of the teachers explain the lesson even in local language so that every student can easily understand it. (SHEC- Misha student diary)

However, outside of taught classes the availability of different instructional languages could also be seen as divisive:

The vernacular medium students face the wrath of the students from mainstream English. Even though it has been a couple of months, but yet there is no kind of interaction between these two major factions. This is a great and Vivid Example of Isolation... Even basic courtesies are not exchanged with them. It is a sad state to see. (SHEC - Indira Student diary)

Study Programmes might also encourage integration or increase isolation: students in the UK suggest that they tend not to mix beyond their own course unless they are compelled to do so, through particular modules or placements.

I think people on their own courses stay on their own courses and tend to be friends with [people from their course] (NNC - Females, Yr 2 Ed FG)

... the cohorts all stick together a little bit... All nursing people sort of stick together I think. I don't really speak to anyone else to be honest with you. (NSS- Interview 1 Mixed ethnicity British)

Professional placements seemed to encourage mixing of groups who might otherwise remain separate.

Yes and it depends who you're on placement with, like you tend to get on more with the people on placement don't you. (NNC – Female, Yr 2 Ed FG)

In placements... if you meet some other student you become friendly because all of you will be students there I'm sure. (NSS – Interview 7: Zimbabwean)

The idea of more readily mixing with a diverse range of peers whilst on placements suggests that when there is an authentic reason for greater integration, such as mutual support while working in a less familiar non-student environment, then the criteria for interacting changes: instead of ‘I mix with them because they are like me in terms of race/ caste/ religion/ colour’ it seems that we are more likely to find students saying ‘I mix with them because they are like me, a student’. In this scenario being a student is the main criterion for group membership (being in a minority and relatively powerless regardless of other classificatory criteria).

Students at all our HEIs mentioned places where they come together and where integration or segregation is observed. In India these include common spaces that are not dependent on food or drink; at SHEC student common rooms are available and at IDU there is a social sitting area called ‘The Courtyard’. However at NSS meeting spaces, apart from refectories and cafes, appear to be limited to bars, and a number of these students feel that a meeting place, which does not depend on the sale of alcohol and where students can interact socially would be beneficial:

Be actually nice to have like a big common room like in sixth form. Like we had a massive room, no music or anything or a bar or a pub, but just like pool tables and cards and whatever ...Well the union you go to drink and there's loud music and things like that. (NSS - Interview 10: Mixed Nationalities)

Discussion of Interim results

Our data confirm the prevalence of student groups on these campuses that are frequently and visibly separated according to race, nationality, region and language. Divisions around caste, class, religion, age and sex are more subtle divisions that tend to be less visible to non-participants but are recognised by students themselves. While students on the same programme of study are more likely to mix with each other than

with those on different programmes, separations and divisions are largely repeated within cohort groupings. Such divisions are not unexpected and can be supportive, but at times they were also found to be divisive and isolationist. The actions of teaching and support staff have a direct impact on how these divisions are experienced by students, as either negative and demeaning or positive and enhancing.

Social meeting places were found to potentially have both integrative and isolationist impacts. They can bring different people together who might not otherwise meet, such as home and international students in shared hostel accommodation, a charity football match or community radio project; and they can reinforce division and separation through event labelling that is perceived as exclusionary, such as 'Greek Night', or 'The Caribbean Society'. More informal meeting spaces, which do not depend on the sale of alcohol, and where students can relax and interact socially, are sought by some UK respondents.

Separation and division are strongly evidenced in formal lecture and seminar situations, with different groups sitting separately, saving spaces for friends, and choosing to work with same group peers when faced with class activities, unless lecturers intervene. However, professional work placements do seem to encourage a mixing of students who might otherwise remain in separate groupings in class and on campus. This suggests that having authentic reasons for greater integration, such as mutual benefit and support while working together as a minority in an un-familiar environment, may promote group camaraderie that can transcend other differences, leading to less segregation and the desired enhancement of intercultural understanding, learning and skills.

Language can be a barrier to integration and operates as one of a series of factors in group separation/ lack of integration. In all but one of the institutions (where

the ethnic profile tends towards homogeneity and there are few international students), we found language differences and difficulties leading to feelings of separation, even isolation.

Working in groups, as a teaching strategy, can lead to improved integration or increased separation depending upon how it is organised. If given the freedom to choose who they will work with respondents report separation into groups of like with like according to surface characteristics such as race, region or gender: where groups are staff imposed there are signs of subsequent, improved levels of understanding and integration.

Organisational structures that might be mediated through institutional change include special events organised by Students' Unions, clubs and societies, and the availability and inclusiveness of informal meeting spaces. Course provisions and study programmes that encourage integration are likely to include work placements, effective language support classes for non-native speakers of English, plus compulsory modules for all students, such as study skills, or Social Justice, that include intercultural skills acquisition, help integration and decrease feelings of isolation.

Conclusions and ways forward

Those who spoke to us, whether diarists or focus/ group interviewees, all described experiences of separation between groups on their campuses, sometimes operating as a support structure, and sometimes due to differential treatment on the grounds of surface characteristics such as race or caste. As Gundara (2000:99) notes,

'The subtleties of discrimination in higher education institutions are very difficult to tackle because they are camouflaged in many ways.'

Nevertheless, the majority of respondents also suggested that the enhancement of integration was possible and desirable.

Our findings suggest many different ways in which inclusion, integration and separation are experienced by students and staff in the participating HE institutions. The location of those experiences lies as much in encounters between students and staff in informal, incidental, and social arenas as it does in those that are academically related, formally structured, planned and intended (Eraut, 2000). As such they impact upon individual's experiences and dispositions, potentially shaping their reactions to the cultural diversity they encounter. Those experiences also illustrate how good intentions, such as reservations or group specific activities can have negative consequences, and they shed light not only upon the ways in which exclusion and discrimination operates (Gundara, 2000) but also how some of the negative experiences might be addressed.

This work has led us to begin an exploration of how HE mission statements that proclaim commitment to social inclusion are (or are not) implemented, and to identify and test strategies for change that the data presented here suggest might be beneficial. Such strategies include the extension of mixed group working, and its enhancement through the development of inclusive seminar behaviours which encourage mutual support; adapting the curriculum to encompass modules that sensitise all staff and students to equality and diversity issues; exploring the integrative effects of work and study placements for students and staff; identification and improved labelling of campus events and student activities that are inclusive, and a reduction in those that appear exclusive.

Taken together it appears to us that having authentic reasons for greater integration may be the most productive way of encouraging it on HE campuses, and

thus not only facilitating the acquisition of those intercultural skills and knowledge that are so essential to our modern global world, but also the enhancement of social justice through greater knowledge, understanding and respect for the similarities and differences between people.

Notes

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Appendix 1. Focus groups / Interview questions – UK and India

1. In your experience on campus, do different groups of students and staff get along Ok? Do they mix with each other, seem to understand each other, respect each other and so on?
2. Have any of you experienced any tensions between different groups of students, or staff and students on campus?
 - (a) If yes, can you give some examples?
 - (b) What do you think tends to cause these tensions?
 - (c) Any thoughts about how to resolve them?
3. Are there any particular places (spaces) or events in the university where different people do come together, build friendships and mix comfortably?
4. Are there any specific things which the university can do to
 - (a) help build a sense of community and belonging amongst all its different staff and students?
 - (b) help counteract any negative perceptions of, and attitudes to, people from different backgrounds?
5. What role might different groups (such as staff, student, home, overseas, religious groups) have in building a more integrated community on campus?
6. What might a university campus which is both integrated and socially cohesive look like?

Thank you for taking part in this discussion. It's been really helpful!

Table 1: Characteristics of Participating HEIs 2007/8 (all in principle English

medium)

HE Institution	Size	Std Composition	Provision	Priorities/orientation
UK: New South Shire University (NSS)	22,550 UG & PG students , full and part-time	15% International 85% UK & EU 55% female 53% white	The Arts; Health & Human Sciences; Engineering; ICT; Business; Law; Humanities and Education	‘New model uni. , business like and business facing, shaping graduates futures in a global environment’; entrepreneurial, engendering international & MC understanding
UK: Old North City University (ONC)	14,464 UG & PG students , full and part-time	17% International 83% UK & EU 50% female 47% white	Health & Life Sciences; Design, Engineering & Technology; Comp, Informatics & Media; Social & Int. Studies; Management	‘Making Knowledge work’; transformative role of HE, outward-facing, confronting inequality & celebrating diversity
UK: New North City University (NNC)	5,581 UG & PG, full and part-time	5% International 95% UK & EU 71% female 95% white 45% mature	The Arts; Education; Theology; Business; Health & Life Sciences	‘Excellent, open & progressive HE that embraces difference, challenges prejudice and promotes justice’; Anglican foundation, personal/professional development, life-long learning, sustainable
INDIA: International city-based Deemed University (IDU)	994 UG & PG (PG big majority) students, full-time	3.5%International 96.5% Indian 50% female 1% white 50% reservation (15% SC, 8% ST, 27% OBC)	Social Science & Social Work; Health; Rural Development, Management; Media; Cultural & Education	‘Towards a people-centred tomorrow’; Social Justice; Professionals for practice; research and teaching, reaching out to the wider community
INDIA: Specialist HE city-based College (SHEC)	100 PG students, full-time, studying UG course	1% International 99% Indian 80% female 0% white 50% reservation for Punjabi students	1yr Full-time secondary BEd (teacher education) under Faculty of Arts	‘Share, Care, Learn & Grow’; Sikh foundation - secular environment; special attention to academically challenged and vernacular students

Table 2: Respondent Data Sources

	Student Diaries	Staff Diaries	Student Focus groups	Staff Focus groups	Total
NSS (UK)	1	6+1 not used	25	3	36
NNC (UK)	0	0	13	0	13
ONC (UK)	0	0	0	0	0
SHEC (INDIA)	12 + 2 not used	2	0	0	16
IDU (INDIA)	2	1	20	0	23
Total	15	10	58	3	88

(Total 8,257 words, all inclusive)