

## Author biographies

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# **Joining the dots between teacher education and widening participation in higher education**

## **Abstract**

In England and Australia higher education institutions (HEIs) are required to widen participation in higher education by students from under-represented and non-traditional groups. Widening participation is most effective when it starts early - during compulsory education and other forms of pre-tertiary education. HEIs are providers of pre-service and in-service teacher education, and therefore have the potential to 'join the dots' between teacher education and widening participation. Two approaches are identified: recruiting more diverse cohorts of students to teacher education through targeted, relevant and engaging pre-entry experiences in schools and communities with low rates of progression to HE; and preparing all teachers to better support the tenets of widening participation through their professional roles in schools, colleges and communities. This paper focuses on the former, using a structural theoretical lens to understand low participation by particular groups of students. This framework is used to analyse two empirical examples, one from Australia and one from England. The paper concludes by recommending a more systemic approach to widening participation through teacher education, and makes practical suggestions informed by theory, practice and research.

## **Key words**

Teacher taster programmes, pre-service teacher education / initial teacher training; newly qualified teachers; widening participation; access to higher education; literacy; students as advocates/champions/ambassadors.

## Introduction

In both England and Australia, higher education institutions (HEIs) are required to 'widen participation' (WP), with a particular emphasis in both countries on those of lower socio-economic status (SES) and from other under-represented minority groups. (In the Australian context see the Bradley Review, (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2008); while in England see the National Strategy for Widening Access and Student Success (BIS 2014)).

It is widely agreed that widening participation needs to start early during schooling to maximise effectiveness (Moore Sanders and Higham 2013), and that schooling has a significant role to play in reinforcing or overcoming differential rates of participation in higher education. Low school-level attainment explains much of the difference in HE participation rates between social groups (Croll and Attwood 2013). School however often reinforces disparities: poor reading and writing scores at primary school are significantly associated with later low achievement (Cassen and Kingdon, 2007), and large numbers of high attaining disadvantaged pupils at the end of primary school perform less well than their peers subsequently (The Sutton Trust, 2008). Indeed, gaps in attainment for disadvantaged groups appear early in schooling and tend to widen throughout secondary education (Chowdry *et al.* 2012, Vignoles and Crawford, 2009).

This evidence points to the need to include schools, and teachers in the process of widening participation. And indeed, in both England and Australia cross-sector partnership working between HEIs and schools to widen participation are the norm (Bowes *et al* 2013, Gale *et al* 2010 and Moore, Sanderson and Higham 2013). Simultaneously however many of the same HEIs recruit and train new teachers, and

provide continuing professional development to existing teaching staff. We believe therefore that their needs to be more 'joining of the dots' between teacher education and widening participation by the higher education sector. In a previous article (Thomas, Bland and Duckworth 2012) we explored ways in which initial and continuing teacher education programmes contribute to preparing teachers to advocate for WP. In this paper we consider how initial teacher education programmes can increase the diversity of their student body, and thus contribute to the capacity of the teaching profession to act as both role models and advocates for WP (see for example Irvine 2002, Clewell and Villegas 2001 and Duckworth & Maxwell 2015). More specially this paper considers the barriers to accessing teacher education for students from excluded groups both theoretically – drawing on the work of Bourdieu and other complementary theorists - and in practice - using two examples undertaken by the authors to engage people from under-represented and non-traditional groups in teacher education resulting in qualified teacher status.

## **Widening participation in England and Australia**

Australia began its journey towards wider participation in higher education in 1990 (DEET 1990). More recent targets introduced by the Federal Government in 2009 (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009) include increasing the number of low socio-economic students enrolled in higher education from 15 per cent over the last two decades to 20 per cent by 2020 and increasing the number of Indigenous (Aboriginal) students eligible for university entrance. To achieve the targets, the Australian Government invested \$437 million

over four years to encourage tertiary institutions to expand their leadership role and provide higher education to all groups in society.

In England the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills published the National strategy for access and student success in 2014. This builds on about two decades of national and institutional policy and practice to widen participation (see for example Gorard et al 2006 and Moore, Sanders and Higham 2013). The focus is not just on students entering higher education, but on completion, attainment and employment outcomes too (HEFCE 2013). The annual performance of each HEI for access is published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency in relation to students from state schools, lower socio-economic groups, low participation neighbourhoods, mature students and in receipt of the disabled students allowance<sup>1</sup>, and similar data is published in relation to continuation and completion. In 2015-16 HEFCE allocated £364.2 million to HEIs to widen participation under the Student Opportunity fund (<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/funding/>) and in the same year over £700 million was committed by institutions in Access Agreements from their additional fee income ([www.offa.org.uk](http://www.offa.org.uk)).

### **Defining widening participation**

Widening participation terminology is problematic, because WP is, as Watson describes, a 'portmanteau' term (Watson 2006). It is used to refer to a process (of change), groups of under-represented students (to be targeted) and the

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2072](https://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2072)

outcome (of change to create a more equitable higher education system and society). All of these usages have a common focus on students from backgrounds and with characteristics that historically have not participated in higher education, and are contemporarily under-represented. In some instances however it is merely used to refer to these students gaining access to higher education, and other conceptualisations focus on access, retention and success in higher education and beyond. The nomenclature is often dominated by a 'deficit' view of these students, positioning them as *less* motivated, *less* well prepared and *less* well qualified, and a threat to academic standards and norms.

The notion of WP is increasingly complex as many once under-represented groups are now, in terms of crude numbers, not 'under-represented' but they are unevenly distributed (i.e. disproportionately in post-1992 HEIs where the intake traditionally been more diverse, disproportionately part-time and more likely to be local students). WP is also often thought of only in terms of undergraduates. However, there are many graduates and postgraduates who, in some senses, might be considered WP (black, working class background, part-time students/ full time workers – see McCulloch and Thomas 2011). As such in the changing face of society where communities are diverse and complex we suggest the need for a broader lens to view notions of WP. This lens includes our own political motivation towards the study; Western societies are characterized by structured inequality conveyed through a class system based on power which is both hierarchical and potentially damaging and conflictual. In exploring WP we recognise the need for rigorous sociological, demographic and economic analysis, including how literacy makes a difference in communities and institutions in relation to other forms of available



economic and social capital (Ade-Ojo and Duckworth, 2015).

## **Widening participation in teacher education**

Thus, while both Australia and England have national policy directed towards widening participation *per se*, it is instructive to look at the case of teacher education in particular. Analysis from the UK (Woodfield 2014) provides an overview of the field of education in comparison to other subject areas and the sector as a whole. Data about the student population in the education discipline in the UK is extracted from this report and summarised below.

Table I: Characteristics of students studying education undergraduate degrees in the UK compared to the whole HE sector (based on 2010-11 data, 1,631,468 students in the HE sector, 103,881 or 6.4% in education)

<b>Student characteristic</b>	<b>Education (%)</b>	<b>Sector (%)</b>
Traditional age	38	60
<b>Mature age</b>	62	40
Women	80	57
Men	20	43
Higher socio-economic status	17	25
Lower socio-economic status	23	23
Data missing	60	52
Parent(s) with HE qualification	20	31
Parents without HE	36	30

Data missing	43	39
White	83	71
Non-White	11	13
Data missing	6	16
No known disability	92	91
Declared disability	8	9

Extracted from Woodfield, 2014

From this data it can be seen that in the UK education performs well with respect to mature age students (which is defined as those over 21 years on entry), but poorly in relation to indicators of class (socio-economic status and parental education) and ethnicity, while men are badly under-represented both in comparison to the sector and the population as a whole. The representation of students who declare a disability is broadly in line with the sector. This therefore points to the need for efforts to widen participation in teacher education in relation to socio-economic status and those who have no family history of higher education, non-White ethnic groups and men. Indeed, there is national concern about the mismatch between the ethnic backgrounds of education students compared to the numbers of BME pupils attending schools (DfE, 2013).

Despite the differences in participation by students from traditionally under-represented groups across the disciplines (Woodfield 2014), there is a shortage of research about widening participation to specific disciplines (see for example Kaehne et al 2014 literature review about interventions to widen participation in healthcare programmes). The field of teacher education is no exception (see Moran 2008 with

regards to the UK context, Macqueen 2012 in Australia and Kelly-Blakeney 2014 in Ireland). Moran (2008) suggests that in the UK there are few initiatives geared specifically at recruiting under-represented groups into teacher education, although she notes that the expansion of entry routes does appear to have impacted positively on fair access and widening participation. Similarly, in Australia, there appears to be little information relating specifically to widening participation in teacher education, although Macqueen (2012) argues that education and nursing should be particularly attractive to students from lower socio-economic status backgrounds while Sellar and Gale applaud a recent focus of WP initiatives on “the capacity to imagine futures” (2011 p122).

The demographics of society are fluid and constantly shifting and it is imperative that in the recruitment and training of teachers this is addressed. British society has become more multicultural over the years and as such teachers need to embrace that diversity. Furthermore, in both British and Australian contexts, many communities, schools and further education colleges are not only ethnically diverse but many also have a proportion of refugees and asylum seekers who have come from challenging backgrounds.

## **Theoretical approach to WP**

There is debate amongst WP researchers about the causes of lower rates of participation amongst some groups compared to others (Kettley, 2007). In light of this debate we set out our conceptual position that informs this paper. We share a general acceptance of Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) theories of cultural capital and habitus as explanations of educational disadvantage and, therefore, of much inequity in educational outcomes and progress of WP students into teaching. This structural approach to inequality sees many of the problems to be embedded into the structures and systems of society in general, and education in particular. This can be contrasted with approaches that place greater emphasis on individual responsibility and agency, and thus tend towards individualising the problem, and locate it within individual students as part of a wider discourse of deficit and failure. In the remainder of this section we examine structural theory about the barriers of access to higher education. This complements the empirical evidence from the northwest of England and Queensland Australia, discussed below, and informs our analysis and implications for teacher education programmes.

“Cultural capital”, a major concept in Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) theory of social reproduction, incorporates ways of speaking, behaving, and interacting, which are learned through interactions with family and social institutions such as home and schools (McLaren, 1989; Meadmore, 1999, Mills and Gale 2003, 2007) and is, therefore, class-related. “Habitus” is the disposition to act in certain ways determined by cultural capital and is the embodiment of cultural capital. This concept has been applied to institutions such as schools by Reay, David and Ball (2001), and higher education institutions (Thomas 2002). In this approach, schools have an identifiable habitus which incorporates practices which mutually shape and reshape

the institutions with their students, their communities and the wider socioeconomic cultures of their catchment areas (Reay et al. 2001, para 1.3). Schools in Australia and the UK, in the main, display a middle-class habitus regardless of their geographical and cultural location.

Reay et al. (2001) emphasised that the positioning of students in relation to the institutional habitus of their school is determined by the congruence of their families' habitus (ibid para 1.7), thus directly impacting educational outcomes and potentially limiting opportunities for those students who do not meet schools' cultural expectations, and advantaging those who do. The work of these authors and our own position may be seen as being influenced by Paul Willis' research. Like Willis' (1977) study, we explore how learners' 'choices' or lack of them, still reflect a distinctive cultural pattern of social reproduction. Ball (2008), Reay (2006), Duckworth (2013), Ade-Ojo and Duckworth (2015) discuss the impact of globalisation on education, noting that society's notion of 'choice' is flawed and not all social groups have the same advantages. They challenge and continue to challenge a legacy left by New Labour, continued by the coalition government, and most recently by the Conservatives of a meritocratic system, which supports theories that assume 'choice' paradigms in exploring education and choice career trajectories rather than recognising structural inequality. This reductive lens fails to see the impact of capital, or the lack of capitals on choice, and the impact of this as symbolic violence (Duckworth 2013, 16).

Symbolic violence occurs when those in a dominant position apply rules and judgements according to their own value system (in other words according to their own habitus) and those subjected to the violence are in a weak position to challenge

the dominance (Duckworth 2013, 14). The 'victim' accepts the status quo as if it were the natural order (Mills, 2008a). As Mills (2008b) points out, teachers may play a role in maintaining inequality, as they may not see and "often do not intend the social sorting that schooling imparts on students" (p. 262), heedless of how "the hidden linkages between scholastic aptitude and cultural heritage point to the role that schools and school systems play in reproducing social and cultural inequalities" (p. 261).

Working-class, ethnic minorities and other under-represented students are marginalised through conflicting habitus and school expectations of cultural capital. When the middle class enter the educational field possessing a set of dispositions that are deemed the 'norm' this enables acclimatisation to the school system like 'a fish to water' (Bourdieu and Waquant 1992: 121). With this in mind we argue that the flow of symbolic violence may be ruptured by providing strategies to promote wider engagement of teachers from diverse communities to then become ambassadors of WP and effectively disrupt the traditional, middle-class, white, norms. Juxtaposed to this the trainee teachers and qualified teachers' impact on the flow of capitals of their learners and promote WP together with what Duckworth and Maxwell (2015) describes as a social justice model of mentoring which is embedded within the system rather than an add-on.

### **Literacies and progression into Teaching**

Teachers are perceived as having legitimate knowledge that they can pass onto students who, in many cases, do not have the 'right' knowledge, possessing, for example, vernacular literacies rather than those of the dominant institution (Duckworth and Brzeski 2015). This legitimacy is strongly linked to what and whose

knowledge is important and, therefore, to symbolic power. Together with other forms of capital, it is worth considering the impact of social conditions on linguistic capital as an embodied cultural capital. There is a recognition that 'language is not simply an instrument of communication: it also provides, together with a richer or poorer vocabulary, a more or less complex system of categories, so the capacity to decipher and manipulate complex structures, whether logical or aesthetic, descends partly on the language transmitted in the family' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977: 73).

In developing his approach to language and linguistic exchange, Bourdieu applies and elaborates the ideas that make up the theory of practice (Bourdieu 1994: 17). He applies this to the relationship of linguistic habitus and the linguistic market. The agents' positioning within the linguistic exchange are in the context of family, school, peers, college, work etc. Bourdieu et al. (1994), Bourdieu (1994) and Goffman (1981) argue that when considering 'talk' and its function, more than linguistic analysis is required. The position of the speaker in relation to class, gender and ethnicity etc. need to be located. Indeed, speech is a signifier of positioning in the field and in recognition of this accents and dialect are recognised as working to scribe an agent's linguistic identity on their body. Lawler (2004) draws on *distinction* as a 'significant way class operates'; the dominant classes in society are in the power position to define their 'cultural arbitrary' as superior to that of the working classes, and thereby to naturalise their superiority. Symbolic power is present in the legitimate authority of the middle and upper class dispositions, which includes ways of speaking.

Bernstein (1971) asserts that there are two language codes, restricted and elaborated. Elaborated is aligned with the middle and upper classes and defined as a richer use of language that for example would utilise more adjectives whilst restricted by comparison is viewed as more clipped and monosyllabic and aligned to the working classes. Bernstein believed that working class has access to one code, whilst the middle-class has access to both as a result of them having the opportunity to be more socially, culturally and of course geographically mobile throughout their life. Bourdieu argues that Bernstein fails to relate language and its codes 'to the social product to its social conditions of its production, or even as one might expect from the sociology of education, to its academic conditions', (Bourdieu 1994: 53).

Bourdieu's work on education and its impact in the reproduction of social inequality (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) provides a framework to explore literacy as a cultural capital and teacher recruitment and education as a site of production and reproduction of power positions, where certain literacy practices are considered more legitimate than others. Literacy practices shape the way we relate to and interact with literacy and are interwoven with our identity and practices. It is important to recognise that literacy is not value free; it is not neutral but deeply political. Gee (2000) explores how discourses offer us markers of identity which can shift from one context to the next. For example, writing shopping lists to buy potatoes, milk and fish – we are writing as a mother, father, carer; on the other hand on writing this paper, we are positioned as academics. These changing discourses, in which we write are mediated through the



literacy we use. These literacy events<sup>2</sup> (see Heath 1983; Street 1984; Barton 1994) have unequal power and value when framed against the dominant ideologies of literacy (Ade-Ojo and Duckworth 2015).

All uses of literacies are shaped in and by their social contexts which means that even the most established and institutionalised conceptions of literacy can be traced back to social and cultural conventions, needs and values (Gee 2000). Hence, literacy can never be regarded as objective and ideologically neutral. This paper seeks to contest the symbolic domination of institutionalised literacies and open up a frame of reference which offers the opportunity for potential teachers to accrue linguistic capital to rupture the cycle of symbolic violence. To do this we will explore how the participants on the teacher taster programmes did not feel well equipped to navigate through literacy practices of applying for university and navigating through the Higher Education system. Capital literacy practices are 'symbolic', which is in this case *institutional literacies*: the participants struggled with the institutional literacies to apply for teacher education courses and accessing Higher Education.

## **The empirical projects**

This paper draws on two studies to explore the barriers to accessing teacher education from an applied perspective: one in the North West of England and the

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<sup>2</sup> A literacy event can be viewed as any occasion/activity where the written text is essential to the activity being carried out e.g. consider the notes we wrote to remember what we needed to buy from the supermarket and the writing of this paper needed to recognise the research, in terms of disseminating our finding to the world of academia.

second in Queensland Australia. The UK project, is focused on two community based teacher-education programmes; the Australian project, a response to WP understandings, is an equity-focused initiative introduced in mid-2008 to take pre-service teacher education into the final two years of secondary school. Broad details of the latter project will be discussed later in relation to the findings of the British project.

### **Increasing the number of students entering teacher education from poor, ethnically diverse communities in the North West of England with low rates of participation in higher education**

The locations of the research projects we draw upon are in the North West of England; located in the culturally and ethnically diverse city of Manchester and Oldham a nearby local town. Manchester and Oldham have Industrial roots. Over the years Manchester has attracted many immigrants from around the world due to the wide variety of employment sectors that the city has had to offer, such as its textile industry and more recently the service industry. In Oldham the attraction has mainly been the industrial; the 1950s and 1960s saw immigrants arriving to work in the cotton mills where there was ample work and demand for labour was very high. These immigrants were willing to work long hours and undertake menial jobs for low pay. Many of the factories they worked in are now derelict. With the demise of Oldham's textile industry, since the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the town has seen hard times for the indigenous, the Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Caribbean Community. Today, 39.7% of school children in Oldham are from a minority ethnic group. The

level of child poverty is worse than the England average with 28% of children living in poverty and 38% in Manchester.

It is against this landscape that the paper draws on two taster programmes for non- traditional and BME (Black or minority ethnic) potential Lifelong Learning trainee teachers held in Oldham and Manchester. The aim of the tasters was to bring together people from the communities who may be interested in pursuing a career in teaching. The drive was to strengthen recruitment and open a dialogue exploring strategies to enhance the representation of BME and non-traditional trainees into teaching. This is particularly relevant when considering the concerns and challenges for the lifelong learning<sup>i</sup> sector workforce which emerged from Foster's review of FE colleges, 'Realising the potential: a review of the future role of further education colleges' (Foster, 2005). Evidence was presented showing that the FE workforce lacks diversity (only 6% of the FE college workforce is from BME communities, compared with 14% of further education students. Recently, the Education and Training work based learning Workforce Survey (2015) also revealed a worrying disparity of ethnic between the teaching workforce (when measured against the communities they serve); after removing those whose ethnic background could not be established it highlighted that 90% of the workforce in Further Education and training were identified as white. This context implied the question: what can be done to close the gap between the teachers' and the community's ethnicities, so the education workforce better reflects the communities they serve?

## **Methodology**

An ethnographic methodological framework was chosen for our research. This methodology was traditionally used by members of the New Literacy Studies (NLS) for researching literacy and social practices (Barton and Hamilton 1998, 2000; Papien 2005; Duckworth 2014). Ethnographic interviewing approaches allowed for a mix of open-ended questioning and careful prompting and probing to prompt not only the learners values and commitments, but also ambivalences, fears and anxieties about navigating through the teacher education route. Participatory action research (PAR) was also employed; it has emerged in recent years as an approach which strives to be liberating and not controlling (see Habermas 1974) for social transformation, and 'consciousness raising' (see Freire 1996). PAR with its alignment to social action, enlightenment (see Habermas 1974) emancipation (see Kemmis, and Wilkinson 1998), adult education intervention, development and change within communities and groups (see Carr and Kemmis 1986; Kemmis 2001; Duckworth and Hamilton 2016) therefore fitted our purpose.

Being positioned as an 'insider' is the lynchpin of action research as is its democratic ethos (see Kemmis, 1993; Cohen et al. 2007) and emancipatory nature (Zuber-Kerritt 1996). One of the authors was already a member of the community where the two taster programmes were held. However, there was and remains an awareness of a dichotomy between feeling simultaneously both the 'same' and 'different'. The author remained living in the community, but was now a teacher working in a university which positioned her as a professional and an outsider. The recognition of our changing position is crucial in allowing us to understand the lens we look through to explore this research. In order to gain entrance we needed to

work with gate keepers who were BME as well as indigenous insiders. To do this we worked closely with community links that worked for and with rich and diverse communities.

### **The gatekeepers**

The Manchester taster was promoted utilising *insider* links and networks, which was led by community worker, who ran a Muslim primary school and also educational courses for the families and children in the area. She promoted and helped recruit potential student teachers through previous engagement with the BME community in the area. A bespoke read leaflet, was produced and distributed to Community and Voluntary sector organizations. In addition, parents of children attending the School and Pre-school were targeted. The Oldham taster was also promoted utilising community links and networks, which the community worker and author had established through previous engagement in the Oldham area (Author 2010). A bespoke leaflet was produced and distributed to FE institutions, Job Centre Plus, Community and Voluntary sector organizations. In addition, the community worker also targeted people who were made redundant or under threat of being made redundant. Both of the programmes were offered in the attendees' communities.

### **Shape of taster programmes**

The taster programmes were delivered over three consecutive week days, which included visits to local colleges and observing lessons. Whilst the other two days were dedicated to offering the participants an overview of teaching in the

lifelong learning sector and importantly facilitating potential trainees to put plans together to move forward into teaching, which included the steps they needed to take in order to gain the qualifications to apply for teaching.

## **Findings**

Based on the taster courses based in Manchester and Oldham we explored the barriers to accessing teacher training by WVP participants. The ethnic breakdown of the progression routes from the taster programme in Manchester, for example, shows that the eleven potential teachers who attended included five Asian and three Arab attendees with smaller numbers of other ethnicities. The Oldham taster session, by contrast, was attended by equal numbers of Asian and White ethnicities and two Black African participants.

The Manchester sessions were the driving force for one attendee to apply for teaching within primary education. It has supported two attendees to apply for a teaching qualification in lifelong learning at university. Two attendees were interested in applying to train to become support teachers and three were unable to apply as their education was only equivalent to UK Level 2. Advice was given and support was offered to these attendees regarding a Community Initiative facilitating training to create a clearer pathway and facilitates access into teaching. Three people attending are still undecided and are being followed up with further information to empower them to make a decision.

By comparison, the Oldham sessions were the driving force for three attendees to apply for teaching within primary education. It has supported eight

attendees to apply for a teaching qualification in Post-Compulsory education. One attendee was unable to apply as his education was only equivalent to UK Level 2. Advice was given to this attendee regarding researching the possible conversion of the overseas qualification, which would allow a clearer pathway and facilitate access into teaching. Seven people attendee are still undecided and would like further information to make a decision. Finally, one person attendee decided that teaching was not a path they wished to pursue.

### **Literacy and access into teacher education**

All the participants felt confident in their spoken English. However, of the 31 participants across both taster sessions, 28 experienced difficulty with the literacy practices needed to progress to and enter the teaching professions. This number included the ten indigenous participants. Marsha spoke of:

Int: Why haven't you applied to the university to do your teacher training

Resp: I've been on the university sites, but I don't understand where to go. Someone told me to go on the Graduate Teacher Training Registry<sup>ii</sup> (GTTR), but it made no sense when I was on there

Int: Did you ask a careers adviser

Resp: Looking after the kids I don't have time to visit them, it all just looks so difficult and make me feel thick somehow.

Int: Why

Resp: Well I want to teach hairdressing and got my qualifications before the kids came along. I'd love to teach it, that's why I'm here. I was good at styling an' all

that. But when I look at applying to be a teacher and all that paperwork, it seemed a mountain too big. I don't understand half the words besides.

Whilst John said:

Resp: I got made redundant and wanted to make use of my skills. The careers service kept giving me loads of information on training, but I just felt overwhelmed with it all. I rang round colleges but I was passed from one person to the next. I'm fifty one next and I just want to know what qualifications I need to become a teacher. I'd like to teach numeracy because I've always been good with numbers. But I just need to know what I need to do like to get there.

And although 35 of the minority ethnic (ME) participants had degrees and post-graduate degrees from their homeland, 32 out of the 40 could not navigate through the entry system for teacher education in the UK.

Shakira stated:

Resp: It just put me off when I tried to apply to become a teacher and I couldn't understand how to do it. Someone gave me website details but I found it hard to you know. That's why comin' here is really helpful being helped as well.

Whilst Amina said:

Resp: It makes me feel so stupid that I've got a masters from Pakistan but I can't apply to be a teacher here.



Int: Why?

Resp: I keep being given lots of different information. I've got loads of prospectuses and information. But it's just all too much

Int: What would make it easier?

Resp: To have it broken down into small steps, so I could get a grip on what I needed to do. I want to work with people like me you see, there's loads of us with qualifications from back home who would like to teach.

Fifteen of the participants do not feel confident with their own skills to become a teacher. Sheila, a single mum with three young children at school describes how:

Resp: I've always wanted to be teacher and when I knew this taster was on I thought I'd give it a go.

Int: Has it been helpful?

Resp: I feel really good about it now and know I've got to go back to college to finish my qualification in childcare I started before I got pregnant. Once I have my level 3, like you say I can apply for the teaching course. I just wish I'd known this in September and I would have started it.

Int: Why didn't you know it?

Resp: I don't know any teachers so it's hard like to find out what you need, coming here and getting straight answers and being given information on a one to one with people who know has been great.

### **Opening up a critical space**

Opening up a space for critical reflection and dialogue the participants identified institutional literacies as an obstacle which stopped them progressing and becoming a teacher. It was this move to a more a holistic approach which was strengthened as a result of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) and the strong bonds formed with the participants that allowed a critical space explore the learners' motivations and barriers. Social capital is not a homogenous resource equally available and accessible to all members of communities. For the participants on the taster programmes, who had been constrained by class, gender and ethnicity both they and their communities benefitted from having a teacher education specialist come into their community and offer insights into routes into teacher education and the application process.

### **Taking university learning into schools – an Australian example**

The under-representation of students from low SES and non-white backgrounds raises the question: 'in what ways can HEIs promote access into teacher education for students from these non-traditional groups'? One innovative Australian project pioneered a response to the question in 2008 with some success. The project, known as 'QU Teach', was created following a discussion between the principal of a secondary school serving a socio-economically disadvantaged area north of Brisbane, Queensland, and academics of Queensland University of Technology's (QUT) Faculty of Education. During the discussion, lamenting the below average progression of the school's senior students to university and identifying the need for teachers from diverse backgrounds, the principal raised the

question: “how can we grow our own teachers?” (Rissman, Carrington & Bland, 2013).

The project that emanated from this chance remark led to a partnership between the University, the school, and the State Department of Education to jointly fund the teaching of first year Bachelor of Education subjects to Year 11 and 12 (15-17 year-old) students at the secondary school. Four nearby schools were also invited to participate with the project delivered twice a week after school hours at the host school’s campus. Student participants were nominated on the basis of ability in English and an interest in a career in teaching. Four foundation subjects from the first year of the four-year teaching degree were studied across the two years of senior schooling, in addition to regular school subjects. It should be noted that the first-year subjects offered were sufficiently generic to allow for learning transfer to other career areas and did not lock students into the teaching degree. Students passing two of the four subjects studied received guaranteed entry to a range of undergraduate courses, from education to business and health, following the completion of Year 12. The University waived all fees for subjects undertaken during the program and credit was given for each subject passed.

Most importantly, the subjects were undertaken in the familiar and safe environment of the school, with school-based tutors funded by the Department of Education and lectures presented at the school by university academics. Familiarisation visits were organised to the university’s campuses as the majority of participants had very limited knowledge of university culture or even what a campus looked like. Although up to two years younger than their university student counterparts, the school students were required to achieve to the same level.. A few

found the challenge beyond their level of cognitive maturity, but of the initial intake of 25 students, 16 were offered guaranteed entry to the university. In essence, QUTeach provided the opportunity for the participants to demonstrate not only their academic potential but their current “higher level and critical thinking skills” (Kift, 2009 p3) through an integrated, intentional, supportive and inclusive curriculum.

An evaluation of the project carried out at the end of 2009 showed that the project was successful on a number of factors and it was recognised with a national award for innovation. Many students interviewed for the evaluation stated that, without QUTeach, they would not have considered university as a viable option with some saying that they would not have applied for a teaching course as they would not expect to obtain a sufficiently high school qualification. Some year 12 students credited the project with making their ambitions realisable with one saying “it was like I want to be a teacher; this is the perfect thing for me”. Another felt the education subjects would contribute to her ambition of “being a music teacher”. One student discovered choices she had “never even thought about but now I think I might want to do” while another said the project “has kind of put uni as a doorway instead of closing it completely” (Rissman, Carrington & Bland, 2013).

Of those who subsequently gained entry to full-time university studies, the QUTeach project’s participants identified a number of features leading to its success.

While still at school, the key features were:

- having a taste of what life will be like after completing school;
- introduction to university learning;
- 24 hours a day access to the university’s library databases;
- the support and freedom to contact the university coordinator and teachers with questions;

- the strong focus on academic writing, referencing and paraphrasing developed skills that had direct benefits for school subjects; and
- emails keeping them up-to-date with on-campus happenings.

In the transition to full-time university study, the key features identified by the participants were familiarity with university through excursions to the campus and having an instant friendship group on campus. Those who have few tertiary students role models or family experience of a higher education environment have few places to turn for first-hand and realistic advice (Collier and Morgan 2008; Macqueen, 2012) and the campus visits, incorporating meetings with current university students, were essential in building cultural capital.

The principal of the host school noted the positive effect that QUTeach had on her school including very positive publicity in the local media and, as knowledge of the project and the success of the student participants spread through the school community, aspirations for university which were previously poor, were raised among the general student population. Progression to university increased from 21% to 31% of Year 12 school leavers within one year while progression in three of the other participating schools also increased markedly (Rissman, Carrington & Bland, 2013). The project evaluation demonstrated success in building individual capacity of students and helped to change the cultures of the participating schools (Rissman, Carrington & Bland, 2013).

As also demonstrated in the UK program, the safe space for critical reflection and dialogue offered by the QUTeach project removed perceived barriers to higher education. Through studying university level subjects, the school students became immersed in the language of university, developing linguistic capital, and were further

empowered through the provision of essential cultural capital in the form of university entry credentials. As a model for widening participation and for increasing the diversity of backgrounds of teachers in western education systems, the project was innovative and had obvious benefits for the participants, their schools, the university and the teaching profession. QUTeach has contributed to the evidence base supporting WP in relation to teacher recruitment; sustainability of such a project is, however, limited by the willingness of the partners to continue to bear costs and waive fees and susceptible to the changing priorities of government and institutional policies.

While the British and Australian projects were very different in their focus and approach, they both serve the purpose of empowering people from under-represented groups, creating awareness of tertiary options and opening up the possibility of a career in teaching. The learnings from these projects are able to contribute insights to widening participation initiatives in both countries.

## **Conclusion**

This paper demonstrates that there is a paucity of research on widening participation into specific disciplines in general and teacher education in particular. Expanding the diversity of the teaching profession is however an important way in which higher education institutions can contribute to the overall goal of widening participation in higher education as schools are fundamental to shaping who participates in higher education. We have used an explicitly structural theoretical lens to consider the barriers to participation for certain under-represented groups, and used this understanding to analyse the effectiveness of two different, but

complementary initiatives in Australia and England targeting potential students with a range of widening participation characteristics to enter a university education programme.

The paper has demonstrated that, as asserted by Bourdieu, domination, whether class, gender or ethnicity, is secured through a symbolic universe that defines categories of distinction and thereby baffling the core reality of structural inequality that the participants faced in this study in their daily lives. To be dominant is to be able to define what a society values as distinction which, in turn, corresponds to what the dominant classes possess and display; thus reproducing their own dominance as 'legitimised distinction'.

The social and cultural practices in the fields regulate and shape hierarchies of social order. Practices and the way they are unequally viewed in the public domain of the participants are significant in the field of HE. The cultural capitals in education which include institutional literacies, when viewed through the dominant lens, privilege the middle-classes. To promote diversity and combat social injustice educational programmes clearly need to address issues related to widening participation to attract a workforce which reflects the communities served. As the gap between the rich and poor widens, we argue that it is time for a change in the way potential student teachers access HE and the curriculum if we are to address the needs of under-represented learners. Education needs to dis-entangle itself from neoliberal fusion to create space for contextualised and emancipatory learning: what Mirra and Morrell (2011) describe as 'critically empowered civic agents' creating shared knowledge with communities rather than education that is geared for preparing learners and trainee teachers for work (much like the working class

reproduction in Paul Willis' 1977 study), as a commodity which pays no regard to issues of economic, political and social equality.

The influence of lack of institutional linguistic capital is a concern that needs addressing in order to rupture the flow of symbolic violence. The projects point out the importance of interventions in 'non-traditional' schools and communities, and making the institutional literacy practices required to navigate through the education system to become a teacher more transparent and accessible. The potential of recruiting future role models of, and ambassadors for, WP which reflect the community they serve is increased considerably through such embedded approaches.

We conclude that in order to widen participation in higher education HEI's should explicitly widen participation in teacher education programmes. This may be achieved by:

1. Strengthening their links with schools, community groups and gate-keepers in geographical areas with low rates of participation in higher education in general and teacher education in particular.
2. Developing bespoke widening participation packages to meet the needs of under-represented groups in school and community locations.
3. Examining the institutional literacies that they present to potential students, and how they can be simplified or translated to reduce unnecessary barriers to participation.

The need to widen participation in teacher education in both Australia and the UK has led to emerging and creative ways of increasing the aspirations of potential students from under-represented groups. Training for front-line teaching staff who are or will be in a position of influence to become advocates in their schools is one possible mechanism to help increase academic awareness, create a fairer system of education and close the HE participation gap (Thomas et al. 2012). But in addition, we are using our current and scheduled research to try to develop a



more strategic and systemic approaches to WP and partnerships working with schools and colleges through teacher education and training.

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<sup>i</sup> Lifelong learning (LL) has now become a ubiquitous part of the rhetoric of contemporary educational policy, research and professional discourse. . LL crosses sectors, promoting learning beyond traditional schooling and throughout adult life. It refers to all educational provision and all forms of learning including adult learning in formal and informal contexts. This paper takes lifelong learning to be adult learning, widely defined.

<sup>ii</sup> UCAS Teacher Training, formerly the Graduate Teacher Training Registry (GTTR), is the subsidiary of UCAS responsible for student applications from graduates (and those about to graduate) to providers of Initial Teacher Training in the United Kingdom.