Reflective piece

Truly inclusive education: Teaching qualitative methods in psychology to enhance inclusion in the higher education psychology curriculum

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Qualitative psychological research frequently focuses on issues of inequality, and as such researchers are committed to inclusion, including in education. However, as students in higher education become more diverse, and the sector becomes increasingly motivated to decolonise curricula and enhance inclusion in the classroom, how can we draw on our expertise and methodologies to create truly inclusive education? The Teaching Qualitative Psychology (TQP) workshop provided an opportunity to reflect on how we can translate our research ethos into teaching practices, increase our students' awareness of diversity and inclusion, and practically ensure that our students feel a sense of belonging and psychological safety in our classrooms (physical and virtual). We close with a call to share resources and effective practices across the qualitative psychology teaching community.

What do we mean by 'truly inclusive' education?

THIS ARTICLE REPORTS on a workshop delivered on behalf of the Teaching Qualitative Psychology (TQP) group at the Qualitative Methods in Psychology (QMiP) conference at De Montfort University, 13 July 2022. Here, we present a summary of the key ideas and concepts discussed during that workshop.

In recent times, the higher education sector has focused on equality for large, demographic groups, based around, for example, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, and disability. Metrics-based league tables and initiatives, such as Access and Participation Plans and the Teaching Excellence Framework, are viewed as drivers for improvement of inclusion in order to improve institutional performance (Williamson et al., 2020). For example, Black, Asian, and Minoritised ethnic students, first-in-family students, financially disadvantaged students, and disabled students, are less likely to attend higher education programmes, to complete their studies at university, or to receive high degree classifications (e.g. Richardson et al., 2020).

Whilst these government-led initiatives have encouraged higher education providers to consider closing these awarding gaps, consideration of large-scale demographic groups may lead to assumptions of deficits in terms of the preparedness of students. There has also been a lack of consideration of intersectionality, of individuality, and of those who might define themselves as 'third culture kids', where both parents originate from different cultures, and the student themselves is growing up in a third

Table 1: Reproduced from Thomas and May's (2010) dimensions of diversity.

Diversity dimensions	Examples
Educational	Level/type of entry qualifications; skills; ability; knowledge; educational experience; learning approaches.
Dispositional	Identity; self-esteem; confidence; motivation; aspirations; expectations; preferences; attitudes; assumptions; beliefs; emotional intelligence; maturity; learning styles; perspectives; interests; self-awareness; gender; sexuality.
Circumstantial	Age; disability; paid/voluntary employment; caring responsibilities; geographical location; access to IT and transport services; flexibility; time available; entitlements; financial background and means; martial status.
Cultural	Language; values; cultural capital; religion and belief; country of origin/residence; ethnicity; social background.

country and culture (Pollock et al., 2017). Often, intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2017) (e.g. what are the implications for Black disabled women?) is overlooked through a 'metrification' lens. Our aim here is to consider what works for all students in terms of supporting their inclusion within their university communities.

Individual difference and diversity are not only associated with the 'protected characteristics' proscribed by the Equality Act (2010) (race, age, sex, gender reassignment, disability, marital/civil partnership status, pregnancy/maternity, religion, and sexual orientation). Thomas and May (2010) propose four dimensions of diversity (Table 1). These include an *educational* dimension (e.g. public or state school, BTEC or A levels); *dispositional* dimension (e.g. aspirations, self-awareness, confidence); a *circumstantial* dimension (e.g. abled or disabled, resources available); and a *cultural* dimension (e.g. language, religion, social background).

Rather than considering the large-scale demographic trends associated with protected characteristics and university league tables, in this paper we consider the experiences of individual students, with individual needs, and the ways in which we can ensure their inclusion within our qualitative psychology classrooms. The groups that are systemically disadvantaged by our current higher education system are heterogeneous; there are no quick fixes for entire groups. Trends may be somewhat predictive, but cannot capture all circumstances, so cannot be fully predictive.

As such, we adopt Hockings' (2010, p.1) conceptualisation of inclusive education:

> *'The ways in which pedagogy, curricula and assessment are designed and delivered to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all. It embraces a view of the individual and individual difference as the source of diversity that can enrich the lives and learning of others.'*

Instead of assuming deficits in large but diverse groups, we argue that teaching needs to adapt, to allow these diverse voices to be heard, and to contribute to the knowledge, understanding, and perspectives of everyone in the classroom. This, we suggest, is 'truly inclusive' education.

Teaching psychology

Qualitative psychologists are no strangers to considering inclusive practice; much qualitative psychological research investigates the

experiences of individuals from minoritised groups and seeks to amplify the voices of those individuals to address inequality. As researchers, inequality and disadvantage are part of 'the day job', so it is natural to consider educational inclusion too. However, there are some specific challenges within the classroom that differ from research.

One such issue relates to class size, and to the sheer diversity of each class. Diversity is increasing within contemporary higher education (HESA, 2022), and, unlike in research, where we tend to consider one type of diversity (for example, our work with disabled students – Hulme; cancer survivors – McDermott; breastfeeding mothers – Kent), each classroom may contain large numbers of different types of students, with very different needs. How can we design truly inclusive education for these groups?

Firstly, we note that interactive teaching is an essential component of inclusive teaching. If we wish to hear diverse perspectives, we need to empower students to speak, to share their experiences, and draw on their existing knowledge. Fuentes et al. (2021, p.71) summarise this: 'Faculty who adopt and engage in inclusive efforts ensure all students are recognised in the classroom and all sociocultural perspectives have the opportunity to be considered in the course activities (e.g. lectures and discussions).' This is consistent with what we already know about effective teaching from cognitive and educational psychology (Dunlosky et al., 2013), that students learn more when they can actively relate new learning to their own lives and explore it through peer learning.

Large class sizes can be challenging for delivery of active learning; however, flipped learning approaches, where students can study theoretical content asynchronously online, and then actively apply their learning in collaborative classrooms (HEA, 2020), have become more common, and can work well even in large groups. One of us, Hulme, has used problem-based learning effectively with large groups of students (Hulme et al., 2019; see also Bledsoe, 2011). Whilst teaching large groups interactively can be challenging, these challenges can be overcome with appropriate use of technology and some creative pedagogic design that allows students to work in smaller groups within the larger class. Even simply running a Padlet through a taught class, upon which students can offer anonymous insights, comments and questions, can facilitate the hearing of diverse student voices (and these can also be picked up and discussed by the tutor). In this way, students hear from those with different perspectives to their own and learn to appreciate the importance of considering diversity when thinking psychologically. Likewise, as tutors, we have learned important lessons about our students' experiences from being part of these discussions. We have learned a great deal about students' experiences of different types of schooling in different educational systems, or their personal experience of studying in our classes with specific disabilities, all of which has helped us to reflect on ways to enhance inclusion in our courses. A key element of this is to ensure that the direct relevance of the content to be learned is explicitly relevant and meaningful to students (relating to their own lives, topical issues, or career aspirations), to motivate them to engage and reflect on what they can contribute. Student collaboration on task setting and general curriculum can be particularly helpful here.

It is also true that not all students will be able to contribute; autistic students, those with social anxiety, and those with difficult personal experiences around the topic, may not feel comfortable doing so. The key here is to create a safe learning environment, in which students are made aware that they must respect others' diverse views, and in which independent work can be done if the student is unable to contribute. In our experience, students often start by making small contributions in such environments and may slowly feel safer and be empowered to discuss with peers. Anonymous technological responses

can also help here, such as keeping a Padlet open through the class, or using a Class Notebook in MS Teams, to allow students to anonymously post their thoughts and questions, referring back at intervals to address the content that has been raised.

Teaching qualitative research methods in psychology

Teaching qualitative research methods raises specific challenges for inclusion. For example, when taught about different methods of data collection (such as interviews, focus groups, gathering text-based data from the internet) are all your students able to engage with these methods? A hearing-impaired student may find interviews and focus groups challenging due to the need to actively listen; a dyslexic student may find text-based data difficult to read and collate; a student with poor access to internet (e.g. in a rural area) may find it difficult to watch videos online. The principles of universal design for learning (Coffman & Draper, 2021; see also backwards design, Fuentes et al., 2020) require us to consider designing our curricula in such a way that retrospective 'reasonable adjustments' are unnecessary (Nieminen, 2022), and we offer a curriculum that is inclusive to all from the start. One way to manage this is to build in choice for students; can you offer the choice between practicing interviewing skills or finding internet data? Can students be given transcripts to read as well as videos to watch?

The content of the data sets we give students to analyse in labs and for assessments can also be problematic. Accessibility is an important consideration, but disability is not the only issue to take into account. For example, it is important to consider if the data sets you use as examples are relevant and meaningful to all students? Can students from different cultures 'access' the meaning of the data in the same way as other students? For example, one of us (Kent) previously taught thematic analysis with the 'How was school?' data (Alliance for Inclusive Education, 2013), which discusses the experiences of disabled students in UK schools. The context of education here in the UK is very different from that experienced by students who have been educated in other countries. This meant some international students were confused by terminology and expected standards of provision around UK disability support.

Given that we rarely know the details of our students' lives, it is also hard to know which topics might be considered as sensitive. For example, as a single parent, Hulme found learning about classic attachment theory quite challenging because she reflected on whether she was doing the right thing in attending university and leaving her daughter in childcare. Likewise, students who have been raised in care, or by adoptive or other non-traditional families may question their own attachment styles during such teaching. We are accustomed to thinking about certain topics as sensitive – mental ill health, gender and sexuality, prejudice – but sometimes, topics we expect to be innocuous can be sensitive. We are not recommending avoiding teaching such topics, as it is important that students learn about such psychological content to develop their understanding of others (Hulme & Kitching, 2017; Hulme, 2018). However, offering choice in data sets to students provides topics for analysis that are 'safer' and more accessible for them.

International students may also have been brought up with different ethical codes, different cultural norms, and different world views. Psychology has long been recognised as 'WEIRD' (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, Democratic), in that it draws on research conducted by WEIRD researchers (largely from North America, Europe, and Australasia) on WEIRD participants, and largely ignores research from the global south (Henrich, 2021). Much has been published on 'decolonising the curriculum', which requires drawing on research from other cultures (Stone & Ashton, 2021). One way to do this is to ask students to contribute to a class reading list by sharing books and articles that they find culturally or person-

ally meaningful on the topic under study. The list can be updated annually and shared with all students in the class. Students can then be encouraged to draw on culturally diverse research in a class discussion or in their assessment. It is worth noting that there can be a 'protectionist' attitude from some academics – what if students contribute reading in a language I don't understand? What if the research they find hasn't been conducted according to BPS ethical code? Firstly, we might suggest that in a decolonised world, all research, including that written in languages that we don't speak, has value, and we can ask our students to summarise it for us. This allows them to contribute something that otherwise the class could not access and demonstrates the value of diversity. Secondly, discussing ethical codes and values, where they come from, and why we uphold some and not others, can be a valuable way of supporting students to reflect on their own positionality as well as on why we (in the UK) follow the standard BPS code (BPS, 2018). This offers a deeper understanding than simply following the rules mindlessly.

Likewise, representation matters in our data sets and our teaching resources. If we are talking about family mealtimes (e.g. Kent, 2012), with images on our slides, do the families we show all comprise two parents, one male and one female, with two children, all White? Do we show same-gender parents, or children being raised by single parents, grandparents, or different ethnicity foster or adoptive parents sometimes? Can our students see themselves in the resources we share, or are they 'othered' because they don't fit our stereotypical norms?

Positionality is, of course, central to qualitative research. For students who may previously have encountered only quantitative methods, and assume that the point of research is objectivity, understanding the concept of positionality is frequently highly challenging. If they do not fully relate to the positionality of researchers whose articles they are reading, because they have different world views, accessing reflexive thinking and understanding how their own perspective influences and informs their research can be almost impossible. In our experience, sometimes this can lead them to try to mimic, rather than being authentic in their writing. Overcoming this is important, and making our own active and authentic reflections explicit, rather than presenting them in a 'tidy' and pre-organised way, can help them to learn from us as role models (a process called 'intellectual streaking' by Bearman & Molloy, 2017). Of course, we must be prepared for their perspective in their course work to differ markedly from our own, and to mark the authenticity, when we may think their views misaligned to our own values. There can be a temptation when we are busy marking to forget that our students don't always share our own perspectives, but assessment needs to be inclusive. To what extent do we give appropriate credit to an analysis that reflects a contrasting positionality to our own?

So what are the solutions?

All of us as authors have reflected on these issues in our own teaching practices and have attempted to facilitate inclusion. Alongside the general principles raised above, we have also developed ways of working that enable students to learn about diversity, and to see their own diversity as a source of knowledge that has value both for themselves and for their peers. In this section of our paper, we share some of those ideas.

In 2017–2018, Kent and Hulme were preparing to teach thematic analysis to second year (Level 5) students at Keele University, and to deliver equivalent classes to students in China on a transnational education course. Kent's reflections on previous iterations of our qualitative methods classes, based around the openly available 'How was school?' data (ALLFIE, 2013) and the 'friendship' data (Sullivan & Forrester, 2019), suggested that, despite

excellent quality, these resources were not accessible to all students, given the lack of understanding of UK disability processes (as discussed above), and different cultural perspectives on friendship. Likewise, international students studying in the UK sometimes felt very isolated, and analysing data on friendship could exacerbate their feelings of loneliness. Representations of diversity within these data sets were also limited. Drawing on our commitment to offering student choice, we therefore recruited paid student researchers to work with us to develop new resources to use alongside the existing data sets. Students chose the topics, recruited participants to be interviewed and managed consent, conducted the interviews, recorded them, transcribed them, and checked consent for public sharing with the participants. We now have video recordings, audio files and transcripts, with five on happiness and four on living abroad, with diverse participants and interviewers (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, first language) respectively on each of two research questions:

- How do you keep yourself happy and protect yourself from mental distress?
- What are your experiences of living abroad?

These topics were chosen because the team agreed that they were meaningful and relevant to diverse students, whilst being inclusive and not overly sensitive in their own right. The resulting interviews contain rich, meaningful data, which allow students to practice their own analysis skills. The resources can also be used to reflect on what effective interview practice looks like, and how it can be improved or adapted for different interviewees, as students are able to reflect on the practices of their peers conducting interviews. Providing transcripts alongside video and audio means that students can access the content in different ways depending on their needs. In piloting the resources with our students, we found that all four topics (how was school, friendship, happiness, living abroad) were appealing to students, and mean marks across the different assessments were statistically similar, suggesting that all four data sets were comparable in terms of level of difficulty and so parity of assessment tasks. We believe that this confirms our view that providing students with choice, and offering alternative topics for analysis, is a legitimate step towards inclusion and accessibility for all.

McDermott also experienced a similar reflective process on utilising the friendship data in her teaching, and adopted a different approach, but with some similarities. While teaching first year students narrative analysis, she asked each student to write a 1500 word narrative of either learning to drive or their experience of transition to university. From these, she selected eight diverse narratives, sought permission to share anonymised versions for educational purposes, and now presents these narratives as her data sets for students to analyse and write up for assessment. This offers a substantively smaller, but still rich, data set for students, which is accessible to students who find dense written text difficult to access. The data set includes narratives written by those who were successful learning to drive and those who found the process challenging. They also reflect the experiences of home students transitioning to university, those who find the transition to university difficult, international students and those who experience social anxiety.

Both of our examples above involve contributions from students, as participants, researchers, or designers of projects. This gives us a real advantage in allowing student voices, in all their diversity, to be heard through our teaching resources in a variety of ways. All three of us have also noted that working with diverse students as researchers offers similar benefits. For example, Hulme has empowered disabled and other minoritised students to research their own communities for final year projects and MSc projects, enabling

them to see how their membership of those communities brings authentic insight into the research design, its conduct, and its reporting. As supervisors, we have learned a great deal about the needs of these students that informs our own research and our teaching. In turn, our students note that their minoritised status is an asset to their research, and that subsequent publications have developed their confidence and employability for life beyond graduation (e.g. Hamilton et al., 2021).

Discussion

We hope that we have provoked reflection around how we ensure that the teaching of qualitative psychology can be enhanced in terms of inclusion, through the use of active learning, student choice, and use of diverse teaching materials and activities. We encourage individual and community reflection on where we are already teaching inclusively, and where we can take active steps to improve, drawing on some of the principles outlined in this article.

We are also aware that the development of resources such as ours is labour intensive, and many psychology departments have small numbers of qualitative researchers with the expertise to produce them (Wiggins et al., 2015). At our QMiP workshop, it was evident that delegates had also produced resources, and developed effective practices for 'truly inclusive' qualitative psychology methods education. We end, therefore, on a call to action. We would like to suggest the development of a resource bank, openly accessible to psychology academics, with resources available under a creative commons license. This would not only ensure that students could be provided with inclusive resources, but would also be supportive and inclusive of our own academic community. Our aspiration would be to include resources that could be used to teach lots of different types of qualitative research methods, at different university levels. There are, of course, challenges in hosting, updating, and maintaining the resource bank, and so we are reaching out to ask if you might be able to help. This could be through sharing your own resources, but ideally also suggesting some practical ideas to help us to make this aspiration a reality.

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