Balancing students' identities as learners and consumers

Advance HE toolkit

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"In the context of the marketisation of higher education, helping students to navigate their identities as learners and consumers will ensure that they get real value from their university experience. This workshop provides an essential tool to enable groups of students to reflect critically on the extent to which they are learners and consumers of their higher education. It also includes activities that support students to develop a shared social identity as students of their discipline, which research suggests will enhance their sense of belonging and help them to achieve their full potential."

Dr Louise Taylor, author

Testimonials

"[This workshop] gives me more of an identity as a student and creates more confidence in my ability."

(Undergraduate student)

"[This workshop] enables you to understand your learning and how to adapt it to maximise your experience and learning on the course."

(Undergraduate student)

"[This workshop has helped me] to think of my degree not as a means to an end to get a job upon graduation but as chance to be the best candidate for jobs, in terms of being well-rounded and knowledgeable."

(Undergraduate student)

"[This workshop] helps you understand yourself better, your motivations and perhaps even help explain why you do well or not that well in your course."

(Undergraduate student)

"This is a really well-designed workshop - even in an online format the students were very engaged, and the questions sparked excellent group discussions. Several students said that, having taken part, they could now see the importance of self-motivated study if they wanted to do well at university."

(Senior lecturer)

Overview

Higher education has undergone a process of marketisation in many countries, including England, UK. This process redefines institutions as 'service providers' and students as 'consumers'. For many educators and students, marketisation has created tensions between this new identity of a consumer, and the more traditional identity of a learner.

With these issues in mind, the workshop described in this toolkit enables students to assess the extent to which they identify as learners and consumers of their education. It then allows them to understand and reflect critically on the implications of those identities for their learning and academic achievement. Finally, students and educators can collaborate to develop a shared social identity as members of their discipline to support learning and teaching.

This toolkit provides materials for educators to run a workshop with their students. It can be run in person or virtually, and with students at any level of study in higher education or who are about to transition into higher education.

In the workshop, students complete a short questionnaire to discover the strength of their learner and consumer identities. Based on their responses, they are categorised as one of four student types created for this workshop: Thinker, Striver, Customer or Undecided. A Thinker, for example, has a strong learner identity and a weak consumer identity, whereas a Striver has both a strong learner identity and a strong consumer identity.

Next, students learn about research on the impact of these identities on learning approaches and academic achievement. They then take part in small group discussions to consider the impacts of the different identity types on learning and achievement.

In the plenary, the educator and students develop their shared social identity as members of their discipline by co-creating a set of attitudes and behaviours that support learning and teaching. Research shows that this can improve students' discipline identity (including a sense of belonging), as well as their approaches to learning and academic success.

Contents

1   Introduction

Higher education has undergone a process of marketisation in many countries in the Global North, including England, UK. This process redefines institutions as 'service providers' and students as 'consumers' (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005). For many students, marketisation has created tensions between this new identity and their more traditional identity as a learner (Bunce, 2019; Lygo-Baker, 2019; Tomlinson, 2015; Williams, 2013). Tensions may include questions such as, to what extent should students expect to be intellectually challenged versus entertained and awarded a degree for minimal effort (Delucchi and Korgen, 2002), and to what extent should students view higher education as a process to develop their critical and creative thinking versus a process to 'serve' them a good degree in exchange for their tuition fees? These types of tensions appear to contribute towards creating a negative experience of learning and teaching for many students and educators (King and Bunce, 2020).

With these issues in mind, the aim of this toolkit is to enable students, with their educators, to discuss and resolve some of the tensions created by defining students as consumers in a marketised higher education context. The toolkit has been developed to enable students to assess and evaluate their identities as learners and consumers of their higher education and support their achievement. It provides a structured space to allow students and their educators to understand and discuss the impact of these two core educational identities on their shared experiences of learning and teaching. It also enables students and educators to develop their shared social identity as members of their discipline, and create a sense of belonging that will support learning and teaching.

2   Research behind the toolkit

2.1   Identities

Identities, or our self-concepts, have long been of interest to psychologists attempting to understand human behaviour. Our identities describe who we think we are, and they influence how we think (eg our values, beliefs, and attitudes) and how we behave. They can be personal or social: personal identities are based on characteristics or traits (eg 'smart'), whereas social identities are based on social roles (eg 'mother') and group membership (eg 'British') (Oyserman et al, 2017).

A central tenant of identity theory (Stryker and Burke, 2000), as developed by researchers from the Global North, is that our personal identities are not isolated psychological constructs but are influenced by societal structures and the groups to which we belong (Terry et al, 1999). According to Social Identity Theory, originally developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), three processes occur when people identify with a social group: 1) social categorisation, which accentuates similarities among prototypical in-group members and accentuates differences between in-group and out-group members; 2) social comparison, whereby the quest for positive distinctiveness leads group members to favour their in-group over other out-groups; and 3) self-enhancement, whereby group members

strive for a positive in-group image to enhance self-esteem. Therefore, membership of groups actively motivates individuals to establish a shared set of values and beliefs, or norms, and to coordinate their behaviour to promote the interests of the group (Haslam, 2017). This means that people are more likely to engage in a particular behaviour if it is in line with the norms of a relevant and salient social group. It is important to note that identities are not fixed but dynamic, meaning that people can adapt how they think and feel in response to changing social contexts (Platow et al, 2017).

2.2   Identities in education

An emerging body of research supports the idea that our identities are both 'fundamental' to learning and 'inseparable' from learning (Platow et al, 2017, 4). For example, the extent to which a student identifies as a student of their discipline (eg psychology student) or as a 'party-goer' carries practical implications for the ways in which they might approach their education (Komarraju and Dial, 2014; Smyth et al, 2015). Haslam (2017), following Dewey (1916), argues that education is undeniably a form of group behaviour involving social processes. Haslam (2017, 19-20) writes:

> "Education-based learning is a fundamentally collaborative endeavour that centres on the capacity for individuals to participate in self-development through more or less constructive engagement with instructors […] [T]his capacity for knowledge co-production is grounded in the dynamic apprehension of shared group membership – such that the success (or otherwise) of the educational process is contingent upon educational participants seeing themselves as sharing social identity (a sense of 'us')."

This social identity approach views learners not as isolated individuals, but as individuals who are influenced by others around them. This approach suggests a key role for educators in supporting (or challenging) identities that facilitate (or inhibit) student learning. Educators have the capacity to do this by creating time and space in the learning environment to discuss and debate with students (Whannell and Whannell, 2015). Educators can also provide opportunities for students to develop supportive relationships, both with fellow students and themselves, to create a shared social identity. Research shows that a shared social identity as a student from a particular discipline provides attitudinal and behavioural norms that support positive approaches to learning and academic achievement (eg Bliuc et al, 2011a, 2011b).

2.2.1 Learner identities and their impact on student learning

The ways in which students learn are complex and influenced by a whole host of personal and social factors (eg Richardson et al, 2012). Students' identities as learners are now understood to be crucial for shaping how they learn and for predicting academic achievement. For example, students who develop a strong, as opposed to weak identity as a 'university student' are more likely to continue with their studies (Jetten et al, 2017). Students with a strong academic identity or academic self-concept, with its associated self-efficacy beliefs, also have better quality motivation, concentration, and deep processing of information (Ommundsen et al, 2005; Zimmerman, 2000). Furthermore, students who identify as 'scholars' invested in academic work are more likely to have learning goals, which are

associated with mastery of material, than performance goals, which are associated with achieving the highest grade. Conversely, students who identify as 'socialisers', that is, those invested in interpersonal relationships, are more likely to have performance goals than learning goals (Komarraju and Dial, 2014).

A strong social identity as a learner also supports academic achievement. Bliuc et al (2011a, 2011b) found that students with a strong social identity as a student of their discipline had higher achievement than students with a weak discipline identity. Specifically, Bliuc et al (2011a) hypothesised that this link between identity and achievement was because a strong discipline identity would be associated with attitudes and behaviours characteristic of deep rather than surface approaches to learning (Bliuc et al, 2011a, 2011b). Deep learning approaches are characterised by an intention to engage in meaningful strategies to create an understanding of the material, whereas surface approaches are concerned with learning facts with the intention of passing (Marton and Säljö, 1976).[1] In line with their predictions, Bliuc et al (2011a) found that students with a strong discipline identity were more likely to adopt deep learning approaches, which were associated with higher achievement. Conversely, students with a strong discipline identity were less likely to adopt surface approaches.

In a similar study looking at these issues longitudinally, Platow et al (2013) found that a strong discipline identity in Semester 2 was positively predicted by deep learning approaches in Semester 1. In part, this was because deep approaches in Semester 1 were associated with higher academic achievement, which served to strengthen discipline identity. Building on this work, Smyth et al (2015) examined differences in the strength of students' discipline identities as well as differences in perceived student group norms. Students with a strong discipline identity were more likely to adopt deep learning approaches than students with a weak discipline identity when discipline group norms were seen as favouring deep learning approaches. In contrast, students with a weak discipline identity were less likely to adopt deep learning approaches, and were not influenced by discipline group norms.

Taken together, this research clearly shows that students' identities and the strength of those identities influence their learning approaches and academic achievement. A stronger academic or discipline identity is associated with learning goals and approaches that are more concerned with understanding information than with memorising facts, and this is associated with higher achievement. To put it another way, the research suggests that a sense of belonging to a learning community is associated with attitudes and behaviours that are conducive to learning and achievement.

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1   Although learning approaches have been highly criticised as providing a simplistic dichotomy of the ways that students learn (eg Beattie et al, 1997), they have been used extensively to understand student learning in higher education. The relation between learning approaches and academic achievement is complex, but a meta-analysis demonstrated that there is a reliable and robust association between deep learning approaches and higher achievement (Richardson et al, 2012). In contrast, surface approaches tend to be associated with lower achievement (Amirali et al, 2004; Diseth and Martinsen, 2003).

2.2.2 Consumer identities and their impact on student learning

The above findings have renewed relevance in light of the emergence of a relatively new student identity in England, UK: that of a customer or consumer. The Dearing report (Dearing, 1997) outlined plans to transfer responsibility for the cost of education from government onto students in line with a neoliberal agenda that viewed higher education not as a societal good but as an individual private one. Students were subsequently defined as consumers with legal protection under various pieces of legislation (eg Consumer Rights Act, 2015).

While not all students embrace this new identity, students who identify as consumers seem to hold a set of attitudes and behave in ways that contradict those relating to a learner identity (see eg Jabbar et al, 2017; King and Bunce, 2020; Molesworth et al, 2009; Sonnenberg, 2017; Todd et al, 2017; Wong and Chiu, 2019). The notion of the student as a consumer was first operationalised empirically by Saunders (2015). He developed a Customer Orientation Scale to assess the extent to which students identified as consumers of their education. Student consumers, according to Saunders, are likely to hold the following types of beliefs: learning is passive; grades are more important than learning; it is educators' responsibility to ensure that students pass their course; it is only worth learning things perceived as useful for their careers; and that a degree is a means to higher-paid employment. Saunders administered the Customer Orientation Scale to more than 2,500 students at a university in Northeast USA during the summer before their course began. He found that almost one third (29%) of students held some level of consumer beliefs, with 9% adopting a strong consumer belief. A similar study of almost 700 undergraduates in England, UK, found that fewer students (18%) held some level of consumer beliefs, although only 27% actively rejected them (Bunce and Bennett, 2021). This data suggests that not all students identify as consumers when surveyed although, there are a significant number of students for whom consumer attitudes and behaviours may impact their learner identities and engagement with learning.

Research on the impacts of consumer identities on learning and achievement is in its infancy. Qualitative research suggests that students who identify strongly as consumers are more motivated by the extrinsic goal of gaining a degree, for example, to enhance future employment prospects, than by intrinsic goals, such as learning about a subject for its inherent interest (King and Bunce, 2020; Tomlinson, 2015, 2017; White, 2007, Wong and Chiu, 2019). This is troubling because students who are extrinsically motivated demonstrate lower engagement, surface learning approaches and lower achievement compared with students who are intrinsically motivated (Deci et al, 1991; Niemiec and Ryan, 2009; Ryan and Deci, 2002).

The first study to explore quantitatively the relations between consumer and learner identities, and to assess the impact of a consumer identity on academic achievement in the UK, was conducted by Bunce et al, (2017). The findings from more than 600 students confirmed that a consumer identity was negatively related to academic achievement, meaning that the more that students identified as consumers, the lower their achievement. The authors found that this was, in part, because a consumer identity seemed to 'compete' with a learner identity, thus when a consumer identity was strong, the impact of a strong learner identity on achievement was reduced.

Extending this study, Bunce and Bennett (2021) examined the potential mediating impact of learning approaches on the relation between a consumer identity and academic achievement (mirroring the research by Bliuc et al, 2011a, on learner identity). Bunce and Bennett hypothesised that students who identify strongly as consumers would be 1) less likely to engage in deep approaches to learning, and 2) more likely to engage in surface approaches to learning, and this would explain why a consumer identity is associated with lower academic achievement. These hypotheses were supported: students who identified more strongly as consumers were less likely to adopt deep approaches to learning and more likely to adopt surface approaches, which were subsequently related to lower academic achievement.

Another potential aspect of consumer identity, frequency of course complaints, was investigated by Taylor Bunce et al, (2022) to explore its relations with discipline identity and approaches to learning. Establishing levels of student (dis)satisfaction and eliciting feedback on how to improve teaching has become ubiquitous in a marketised higher education environment (Hammonds et al, 2017). While some complaints undoubtedly stem from poor service, other complaints may stem from a sense of consumer entitlement and lack of effort or engagement by individual students (Newman and Jadhi, 2009). For example, in 2021, 45% of students' complaints to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator in England and Wales, UK, were about 'service issues', such as teaching quality or facilities, however, only 19% of these were upheld (OIA, 2021). In the study by Taylor Bunce et al, they explored whether the extent of students' complaints about their course could be explained by the combined effects of discipline identity and approaches to learning. Complaining is a social-psychological variable that is affected by an individual's group membership and norms of behaviour associated with that group (Kowalski, 1996). Therefore, students who have a strong discipline identity, which is related to group norms supporting deep learning approaches whereby learning is intrinsically satisfying, may perceive fewer causes for complaining than students with a weak discipline identity. The results from a survey of 679 undergraduates supported these expectations: a stronger discipline identity was related to more deep approaches to learning and fewer course complaints, whereas a weaker discipline identity was related to more surface approaches and more course complaints. Furthermore, Taylor Bunce et al, found that complaining frequency was negatively related to academic achievement, which suggests that complaining is an important additional aspect of a consumer identity (Bunce et al, 2017). The authors conclude that complaining may be an indicator of both a weak discipline identity and passive or surface approaches to learning, which are related to lower achievement.

2.3 Summary and conclusions

Taken together, these findings demonstrate a critical role for students' identities as learners and consumers in shaping their approaches to education and subsequent academic achievement. The research suggests that students with a strong social identity as a learner are more likely to adopt deep approaches to learning, less likely to complain about their course, and have higher achievement than students with a weak learner identity. In contrast, students with a weak social identity as a learner are more likely to adopt surface approaches to learning, more likely to complain, and have lower achievement than students with a strong learner identity. With these issues in mind, the materials

contained in this toolkit were designed to enable students to consider their own identities and to learn about the impact of identities on learning approaches and academic achievement. More broadly, the workshop enables students to consider the attitudes and behaviours that support learning in their discipline in order to develop a shared social identity that supports effective learning and teaching.

3   The workshop

3.1   Workshop structure

The following guidance is aimed at conducting the workshop with a small group of students (ie approximately up to 20) in a 90-minute teaching session. It can be readily adapted for a large group of students or for use in a shorter, 1-hour session. Please see Section 4 for details. An outline of the key elements of the workshop can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Key elements of the workshop with suggested timings for a small group

Small group workshop (90 minutes)	Approx timings
+ Students complete the self-assessment questionnaire ('Student Profiler Quiz') to establish the strength of their learner and consumer identities and discover their student 'type'.	15 min
+ Educator provides students with the infographic handout, then presents PowerPoint slides provided, describing the four student types and the impacts of identities on learning.	15 min
+ In break-out groups, students engage with the discussion questions.*	35 min
+ Educator leads a plenary to develop with students a set of attitudes and behaviours that support learning, in order to create a shared social identity as an 'X student', where X = name of discipline. Students complete the infographic handout, adding the finalised list of statements to take away for reference.	20 min
+ Students and educator complete relevant feedback form to evaluate their experience of the workshop.	5 min

*A short break may be given after this point if necessary.

3.2   Guidance for the workshop – before starting

The workshop can be conducted either in person or virtually, but if it is being done in person then each student will need an internet-enabled computer or smartphone.

Students do not need to do any preparatory reading prior to taking part in the workshop. In fact, it is desirable if students do not do any preparation to reduce the chance of response bias when completing the questionnaire.

Before students complete the self-assessment questionnaire, they should be informed that their

responses will remain confidential and that no one else will have access to their scores. Students should not be asked to disclose their identity scores or student type unless they wish to do so. This should encourage them to complete the questionnaire honestly.

3.2.1 Guidance on the student self-assessment questionnaire (Student Profiler Quiz)

Students will need a device with internet access to complete the self-assessment questionnaire (available here). It should take no more than 10 minutes to complete.

If students wish, they have the option for their scores to be used as part of an ongoing research project examining student identities. They should read the information sheet on the first page of the questionnaire. If they agree to their data being used, they should tick the box to indicate their consent. If they do not agree, they can still continue to the next page and complete the questionnaire. This will not affect their ability to take part in the workshop; it simply means that their data will not be used in the research.

After students have completed the questionnaire, they should make a note of their learner and consumer identity scores and student type on the infographic handout. If students wish to complete the quiz again at a later date, they will be able to compare their scores. For more information about the development and content of the self-assessment questionnaire, please see Section 5.

3.2.2 Guidance on student types

After students complete the self-assessment questionnaire, their learner and consumer identity scores will be generated automatically. These scores are used to categorise each student as one of four student types, for example, a Learner has a strong learner identity and weak consumer identity, a Striver has both a strong learner and consumer identity, whereas a Customer has a strong consumer identity and weak learner identity. Students are given their learner and consumer identity scores and their student type on a webpage that appears immediately after they submit their questionnaire responses (see Figure 1). The student types were developed specifically for this workshop to help students to understand their identity scores[2].

Once students have completed the self-assessment questionnaire, they could be asked to share their

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2   Taylor Bunce et al (2022) found that the most common type is Thinker (53%), followed by Striver (39%), then Customer (4%), and Undecided (4%).
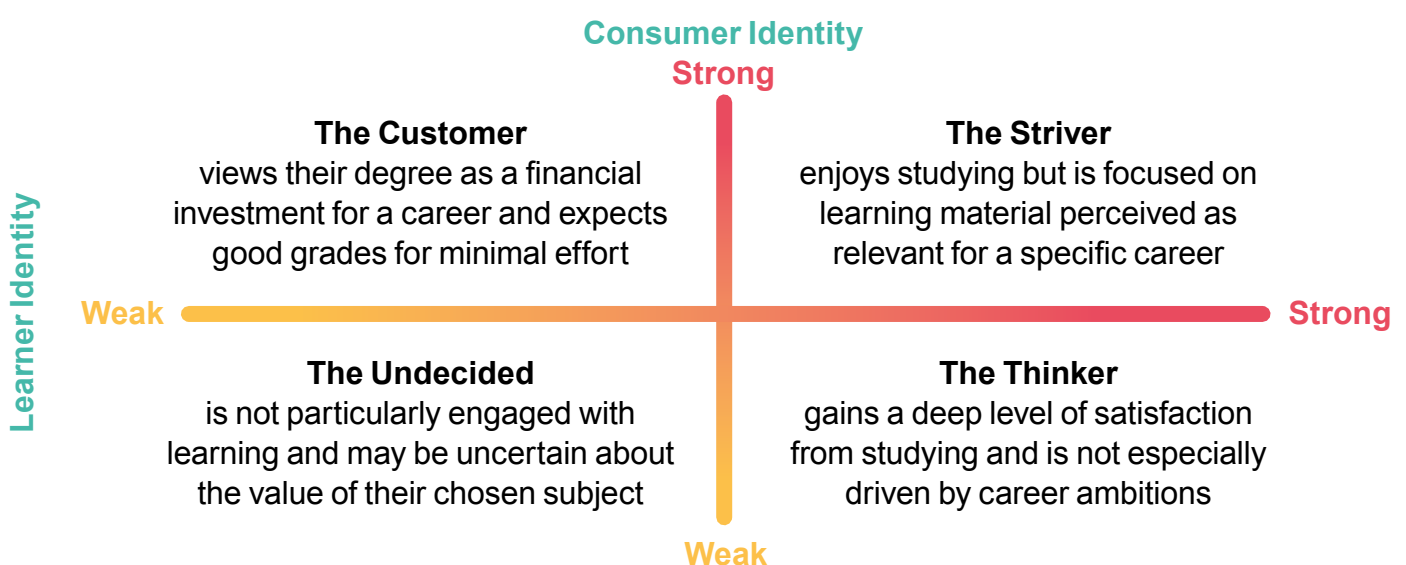
type anonymously using an e-poll. This is optional and should only be done if all students in the workshop consent to it (particularly in small classes where anonymity may not be possible). If students consent, then students and the educator will find out how many of each student type are in the workshop. The poll should be set up so that students can select one of the four student types in a multiple-choice format, that is:

'What is your student type?'

A) Customer

B) Striver

C) Thinker

D) Undecided

The educator can then share the overall responses anonymously with the group. The student types are explained in the PowerPoint presentation, which the educator presents once all students have discovered their identity scores and student type. When discussing the different student types, it is important that students do not feel judged by their type. Each type has its place depending on students' experience of learning and teaching, and their personal circumstances. What is important to discuss is the differences in attitudes and behaviours that are characteristic of each type, and their potential impacts on learning.

Figure 1: The four student types according to the strength of students' learner and consumer identities

Figure 1: The four student types according to the strength of students' learner and consumer identities

Consumer Identity
Strong

The Customer
views their degree as a financial investment for a career and expects good grades for minimal effort

The Striver
enjoys studying but is focused on learning material perceived as relevant for a specific career

Learner Identity

Weak — Strong

The Undecided
is not particularly engaged with learning and may be uncertain about the value of their chosen subject

The Thinker
gains a deep level of satisfaction from studying and is not especially driven by career ambitions

Weak

3.2.3 Guidance for presenting the PowerPoint

Before the PowerPoint is presented, students should be given the infographic handout on which to write their learner and consumer identity scores, as well as their student type. Next, using the slides available here, the educator presents a summary of the key research findings on the impact of learner and consumer identities on learning. Notes are provided in the 'notes' section at the bottom of the slides to guide the educator through the information on each slide.

3.2.4 Guidance for the discussion groups

After the PowerPoint presentation on the impacts of learner and consumer identities on learning, students should be divided into small groups (approximately four to five students per group) for discussion. The suggested discussion questions can be found on the PowerPoint slides and are reproduced below.

These are the questions for discussion.

1   First, reflect on what you think is the purpose of your university education. What were your reasons for attending? Do these reasons relate to the student type Customer, Striver, Thinker or Undecided?

2   How does the Thinker type differ from the Striver and Customer types? Consider the expectations of these different student types in terms of their attitudes towards learning and their behaviours, both on campus and in the classroom.

3   To what extent do you think that your university treats you as a Customer? What about your tutors and fellow students?

4   How is the 'service' provided by your institution similar or different from other types of customer services such as gyms and restaurants? What are the roles of the service provider, in this case lecturers compared to fitness instructors or waiters, and what are the roles and expectations of the customer?

5   What do you think was the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the strength of students' learner and consumer identities? Do you think the prevalence of the different student types may have changed, and if yes, how?

6   What are the possible effects of the four student types on the mental health and emotional wellbeing of students?

7   Research has shown that students with a strong learner identity have higher grades than students

with a strong consumer identity (Bunce et al, 2017). What approaches to learning are associated with strong learner identities or strong consumer identities? (Hint: see this short blog post by Bunce, 2020). Relatedly, who has greater responsibility for ensuring that students pass their course – universities or students?

8   Do you think that your student type is fixed or is it flexible? What factors might influence whether your learner and consumer identities get stronger or weaker?

Each group should be asked to discuss all of the questions. The questions have been structured to facilitate engagement, beginning with a warm-up question and moving on to more challenging ones.

The educator should spend some time with each group in order to learn about students' views, facilitate their discussions and advance the debate.

3.2.5 Guidance for conducting the plenary

The aim of the plenary is for the educator and students to co-create a summary of attitudes and behaviours that support learning in their discipline, in order to develop a shared social identity as a 'X student', where X = name of discipline (eg Psychology student). By the end of this section, students will have completed the blank section on the infographic handout that enables them to record a summary of the key attitudes and behaviours that describe a successful student of their discipline.

The educator could use the heading 'Being a X student means….' (where X = name of discipline) to begin the discussion. Then students could be asked to produce some example attitudes and behaviours that support learning in their discipline, eg 'being curious about new ideas', 'using resources available to me to find out more' or 'asking questions of my tutor if I don't understand something'. This could be done using a tool such as Padlet or other application, which enables students to write their ideas anonymously. If they are finding this difficult, they could take inspiration from statements in the self-assessment questionnaire, or return to their small groups and brainstorm some ideas.

It is important for educators to remember that students' social identity as a learner of their discipline is positively related to deep approaches to learning and higher achievement. In contrast, students' identities as consumers are related to lower achievement through less deep approaches to learning. Thus, students should be encouraged to think through the consequences of their suggestions to ensure that their ideas will not have a negative impact on learning.

Students could then vote for the top few suggestions to create a short list of attitudes and behaviours that describe a successful student of their discipline. They should each write these down in the space provided on the infographic handout. The aim is to support students to come to a consensus and develop a shared social identity of what it means to be a successful student of their discipline. This list could also be shared with students on their online learning platforms and revisited during personal tutor sessions.

4   Alternative workshop formats

4.1   Shorter one-hour workshop

Instead of a 90-minute session, the small group workshop could be run in one hour, with students having previously undertaken some independent tasks (for details, please see Table 2).

Table 2: Key elements for a small group workshop in 1 hour, following 30 minutes of independent study by the student

Independent study (30 mins) followed by small group workshop (1 hr)	Approx timings
Independent study	
+ Students complete the self-assessment questionnaire ('Student profiler quiz') to establish the strength of their learner and consumer identities and discover their student 'type'. They should make a note of their scores and student type for their own reference and be asked to bring their scores with them to the workshop.	10 min
+ Read a blog (Bunce, 2020) explaining the research on the impacts of consumer identities on learning.	5 min
+ Reflect on the discussion questions, considering how identities impact learning.	15 min
Small group workshop	
+ Educator provides students with the infographic handout, then presents PowerPoint slides provided, describing the four student types and the impacts of identities on learning.	15 min
+ In break-out groups students engage with discussion questions	25 min
+ Educator leads a plenary to co-create with students a set of attitudes and behaviours that support learning, in order to develop a shared social identity as an 'X student', where X = name of discipline. Students complete the infographic handout, adding the finalised list of statements to take away for reference.	20 min
+ Students and educator complete relevant feedback form to evaluate their experience of the workshop.	5 min

4.2   Large groups of students

It is possible to conduct the workshop with a larger group of students (ie 20+), but this may require approximately two hours to allow for logistics, a break and a longer plenary to hear from more students.

5 The student identities self-assessment questionnaire

The student self-assessment questionnaire (referred to as the 'Student profiler quiz') is based on two pre-existing scales that assess attitudes, beliefs and behaviours relevant to students' identities as learners and consumers: the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Pintrich et al, 1993) and the Customer Orientation scale (Saunders, 2015) respectively. A summary of these scales can be found in Sections 5.1 and 5.2. For a complete list of the questionnaire items, please see Appendix.

5.1 Learner identity measurement

The Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) (Pintrich et al, 1993) was used to measure learner identity. A subset of questions from this questionnaire was used that assesses attitudes and beliefs about learning. These include:

+ beliefs that academic tasks are highly valuable (task value), eg I am very interested in the content area of my degree

+ learning goals are spurred by curiosity and gaining mastery (intrinsic goal orientation), eg I prefer course material that really challenges me so I can learn new things

+ self-efficacy or a strong belief in one's ability to perform academic tasks (self-efficacy), eg I believe I will receive an excellent result for my degree

+ beliefs that academic achievement is contingent on the amount of effort expended (control of learning beliefs), eg If I try hard enough, then I will understand the course material.

These questions were taken from four subsets of questions forming a total of 22 items. Each item is answered on a seven-point scale, where 1 = not at all true of you and 7 = very true of you. The wording of some of the statements was adapted to make them more suitable for this context. Example statements from each of the four subsets of items include:

Task value

+ I think I will be able to use what I learn in one module in other modules

+ I am very interested in the content area of my degree

+ It is important for me to learn the course material in my classes.

Intrinsic goal orientation

+ I prefer course material that arouses my curiosity, even if it is difficult to learn

+ I prefer course material that really challenges me so I can learn new things.

Self-efficacy for learning and performance

+ I believe I will receive an excellent result for my degree

+ I'm certain I can understand the most difficult material presented in the readings for my courses.

Control of learning beliefs

+ If I study in appropriate ways, then I will be able to learn the material in this course

+ If I try hard enough, then I will understand the course material.

5.2 Consumer identity measurement

The Customer Orientation Scale by Saunders (2015) is a unidimensional scale measuring students' level of agreement with statements assessing their attitudes and behavioural intentions when education is framed as a product. Students rate their level of agreement to 18 items on a scale from 1-5 whereby 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree, with 3 being Neither Agree or Disagree. The scale was originally developed for use in the US, therefore some of the language has been adapted in this toolkit for a British educational context.

Example adapted statements include:

+ I will only take a course in something that will help me earn a lot of money

+ Because I will have paid to attend my institution, it will owe me a degree

+ For the most part, education is something I receive, not something I create

+ It is part of my tutors' job to make sure I pass my courses

+ I think of my university education as a product I am purchasing.

6 Feedback

Feedback from students and educators is important to monitor student and staff experience of the workshop and to ensure that the workshop continues to achieve its aims. Feedback can be provided by completing a very brief form, available for students here and educators here. Thank you.

7   About the author

Dr Louise Taylor is an award-winning Principal Lecturer Student Experience, at Oxford Brookes University. She was awarded a National Teaching Fellowship (2022) for her outstanding contribution to supporting students' identities to improve academic achievement, as well as reducing the degree outcome gap for students from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds. She won a University Alliance Braveheart Award for her anti-racist practice (2021) and she was a finalist in the Higher Education Psychology Teacher of the Year Awards (2021). Louise is Chair of the Psychology of Education Section of the British Psychological Society, and is Co-Editor of Psychology Teaching Review published by the British Psychological Society Division of Academics, Researchers and Teachers in Psychology.

8   Acknowledgements

9   References

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Appendix: Complete list of items in the Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire subset (Pintrich et al., 1993)

If you think the statement is very true of you, choose 7; if a statement is not at all true of you, choose 1. If the statement is more or less true of you, find the number between 1 and 7 that best describes you.

Task Value

+ I think I will be able to use what I learn in this course in other courses.

+ It is important for me to learn the course material in this class.

+ I am very interested in the content area of this course.

+ I think the course material in this class is useful for me to learn.

+ I like the subject matter of this course.

+ Understanding the subject matter of this course is very important to me.

Intrinsic Goal Orientation

+ In a class like this, I prefer course material that really challenges me so I can learn new things.

+ In a class like this, I prefer course material that arouses my curiosity, even if it is difficult to learn.

+ The most satisfying thing for me in this course is trying to understand the content as thoroughly as possible.

+ When I have the opportunity in this class, I choose course assignments that I can learn from even if they don't guarantee a good grade.

Self-Efficacy for Learning and Performance

+ I believe I will receive an excellent grade in this class.

+ I'm certain I can understand the most difficult material presented in the readings for this course.

+ I'm confident I can learn the basic concepts taught in this course.

+ I'm confident I can understand the most complex material presented by the instructor in this course.

+ I'm confident I can do an excellent job on the assignments and tests in this course.

+ I expect to do well in this class.

+ I'm certain I can master the skills being taught in this class.

+ Considering the difficulty of this course, the teacher, and my skills, I think I will do well in this class.

Control of Learning Beliefs

+ If I study in appropriate ways, then I will be able to learn the material in this course.

+ It is my own fault if I don't learn the material in this course.

+ If I try hard enough, then I will understand the course material

+ If I don't understand the course material, it is because I didn't try hard enough.

Customer Orientation Scale (Saunders, 2015)

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) (3 = Neither Agree or Disagree)

+ The main purpose of my university education should be maximising my ability to earn money

+ I will only take a course in something that will help me earn a lot of money

+ If I cannot earn a lot of money after I graduate, I will have wasted my time at my institution

+ It is more important for me to have a high-paying career than one I really like

+ Because I will have paid to attend my institution, it will owe me a degree

+ Developing my critical thinking skills is only important if it helps me with my career

+ For me, it is more important to get a good grade in a course than it is to learn the material

+ While at my institution I am going to try to take the easiest courses possible

+ For the most part, education is something I receive, not something I create

+ If I could get a well-paying job without going to university, I would not be here

+ I only want to learn things in my courses that will help me in my future career

+ If I cannot get a good job after I graduate, I should be able to have some of my tuition fees refunded

+ For me, university is more of a place to get training for a specific career than to gain a general education

+ Concerning my institution, I think of myself primarily as a customer

+ As long as I complete all of my assignments I deserve a good grade in a course

+ It is part of my tutors' job to make sure I pass my courses

+ I think of my university education as a product I am purchasing

+ My tutors should round up my final course grade one or two points if I am close to the next grade boundary

Please note that questions for the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire appear first, followed by the Customer Orientation Questionnaire. Within each of these two sets, the order in which the questions appear are randomised.

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