



**Promoting students' 'resilient thinking' in diverse higher education learning environments: Twelve voices of diversity, challenge and resilience**

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Twelve voices of diversity, challenge and resilience**

**Abdo's story: 'I throw [away] my feelings and start from beginning as somebody [new]...I used to be very angry if I am told that I am wrong...[now] I am wrong, I will be very happy.'**

Abdo is a 40 years old politics student who, together with his wife, came from the Middle East to the UK some ten years ago. He is the father of three and runs his own take-away shop/pizza place in a big English city. He left his home and family at the age of 19 to undertake national service, a moment he describes as a turning point in his life since it meant full independence and separation from his family. He recalls his father's words "...all the time you were growing...at home I [told you] what to do, what not to do...[ now] I can't be with you anymore..." Being recruited to a 'sacrifice' special force trained to detect landmines and roadside bombs, military drill was extreme to the point that '*...many people died during the training...because they would not believe anybody if he said "I am ill" or "I can't do something."*' Abdo describes the resilience he developed during national service '*If I want to feel that I'm human I will not be able to continue or I will get crazy ... so I've thrown away my feelings.*' From an early age Abdo had learned to be a business man, and after leaving the army moved on to trade cars in East Africa. While working there, he suffered twice from malaria, an experience he describes as '*...too hard to go through.*'

Abdo has already completed an IT course at a UK university. His decision to take up a politics course stems from his childhood and youth experience in the Middle East and growing up in a political and conflictive environment that oppresses democratic change and human rights. Having overcome initial language difficulties and struggling with political theory, the main challenge for Abdo is to balance his studies with his responsibilities as a husband, father and business man. Particularly stressful moments occurred during the complicated last pregnancy of his wife, when Abdo had to set aside his studies to care for his family. He describes the personal support and level of understanding on behalf of his tutors during this period as '*tremendous*' and adds: '*...I can't imagine I could continue studying or continue...the course I am doing without them, without their support...they really saw a student not as a student, no, but as father, as brother, as a whole.*' In terms of socialising with his peers, Abdo maintains good relations with his classmates but also recognises his mature status as a problem.

Reflecting on his hard life amidst political conflict in the Middle East, resilience to Abdo is about enriching knowledge by overcoming '*indoctrinated emotions*', and to '*scientifically pull back*' ideologies and beliefs in order to start anew in a culturally and intellectually open-minded manner. This attitude governs his fascination with Middle Eastern and UK politics and his desire to expand his knowledge constantly and to become politically engaged in activities related to social justice, human rights, and democratic change in the Middle East. Abdo also underlines his '*modern*' and outward-looking interpretation of Islam and the Koran in his desire to study, generate cross-cultural understanding, and to continuously improve his knowledge.

Implications for learning, teaching, formal and informal curricula:

- Use of personal life stories and comparative experiences for discussing democracy, conflict, human rights or notions of political activism within the social science/politics curriculum (i.e. group work)
- Committed and supporting personal tutorship in times of personal (family, etc.) crises
- Explore creative and innovative ways in teaching conceptual and theoretical contents within social sciences, politics, anthropology curricula (i.e. link to 'real-life' situations, contexts)
- Provide opportunities to enhance interaction and meaningful knowledge/experience exchange between young and mature students

**Adam's story: '*...one of the things that affects resilience is the capacity of students to self-organise...*'**

Adam is a distinguished and internationally renowned scholar of Politics at a UK university. He has more than 15 years experience of university teaching and research. Adam describes his pathway into Higher Education as 'unintended' and 'accidental'. Having taken up a research post after completing his PhD he soon moved on to become a lecturer while developing a strong research profile. Adam has gathered substantial international experience throughout his career and is active in academic networks and collaborations both in Europe and the United States.

Over the past two to three years, Adam has witnessed a significant rise in the number of international students particularly within the overseas postgraduate taught contingent, which prompted a department-wide student survey to acquire information about the different kinds of '*needs*' and '*expectations*' of home and overseas students. Reflecting on his own teaching experiences with Chinese students, Adam found it difficult to encourage critical thinking and analysis when operating within traditional seminar formats and subsequently tried to engage students '*...by getting them to talk...about the kind of experience in their country and their region.*'

Group work is an important component in Adam's teaching and, in his opinion, it should enable students to conceptualise and theorise around course content and key ideas rather than just sharing personal experiences. Adam associates resilience mainly with student attendance, performance, 'meeting expectations', or drop-out rates and, in this reading, links high levels of 'resilience' to the socially relative homogeneity of the undergraduate student body. In his view, intense induction sessions and dedicated language support mechanisms are crucial for students' academic success.

Adam anticipates challenges in maintaining educational and ethical responsibility in the light of current HE reforms and increasing student fees. Accordingly, his department is working hard not to reduce education to a contractual '*degree delivery*' or a '*consumerist transaction*' but rather to convey to students an interest in the '*...broader question of their engagement with society.*' It is one of Adam's key priorities to give students the tools they can use to be '*...committed and active and engaged citizens...*' and to be culturally and socially '*agile*' and to '*...maximize the opportunities that are available to them.*'

In order to enhance students' learning experiences, Adam argues that departments need to overcome dominant conservative and bureaucratic QAE structures and regulatory regimes and look to developing more creative and imaginative ways of learning and teaching. In order to achieve this goal, the department is currently developing a long-term vision which includes enhanced alumni involvement and more intense co-operation with the university's Students' Union and Politics Society in terms of volunteering, work-based learning and socio-political inclusion initiatives. In Adam's judgment, a key aspect of resilience is the capacity of students to self-organise, build a community and facilitate their own common spaces.

Implications for learning, teaching, formal and informal curricula:

- Departments and schools should create spaces that bestow a sense of community and belonging, allowing students to nourish their resilience and their awareness of responsible citizenship through critical, social dialogue
- Central to affirmative self-image and community-cohesion within the student body is students' engagement with alumni, Student Unions and Student Associations
- Complement traditional, well-established forms of learning and teaching with creative and experiential engagements that set learning in real world contexts, all within more flexible QAE structures

**Alyona's story: 'You don't have to hate burgers to love Russian soup...'**

Alyona comes from a small Baltic state, her mother tongue is Russian and she says '*...I'm proud of it.*' She came to England about two years ago. Her boyfriend had come to the country to work and it turned out that there was a vacancy for her too, so she followed him, leaving home about a week after she graduated from school. She had never worked and never been away from home so far and for so long. Initially the couple lived in '*...lovely Whitby...by the seaside...*' for about a year. Alyona says it was so beautiful that she found it hard to describe so she began sending postcards to her friends and family and this got her into the habit of writing letters home, although she also maintains contact via Skype and her mobile phone.

Mum, Dad and Alyona's closest friend are at home in the Baltic, she says she misses her friend very much, they are so close, but she also misses her room, desk, TV and Soviet trams. Her homesickness is exacerbated by the fact that she can only manage to return home about once a year. Alyona's original intention was to work in England for a summer season, but her mother lost her job so she had to stay and learn to live on her own, as she says '*...taking responsibility for my own life.*' At first life was very difficult. Alyona was doing four jobs at the same time there was no time for herself. She has also had to support her boyfriend whose English is not very good so she manages all their finances and household commitments, paying bills etc. Alyona has found much comfort in her love of music, playing guitar and writing songs and poems, she has also found a measure of common identity and companionship attending a music course at college for two hours a week. '*We are a small group of people from many different places and I suppose you could say I have friends there but to me you only have one or two real friends, the others are just people you know.*'

Having lived in England for about a year Alyona decided to go to university. '*I was taught that when I finish school I have to go to university...same as my parents and friends...*' Indeed out of her class of 25, 17 are now studying somewhere in the UK. She is, at the time of writing looking towards the end of her first year of study on a Politics BA.

In terms of the challenges Alyona has faced, she talks of a period when she did 'bar work'. Often people could be hostile, accusing her of taking the jobs which should be for the English. She ignored such comments '*...they were drunk...*' More significant for her self-image was her experience in class. She was afraid to speak because she worried about misunderstanding and looking stupid. A young person who had been the head of school parliament, always very confident, always expressing an opinion began to '*...feel like the grey mouse...*' She says that she is still '*...really scared...*' but over the months she has begun to get her confidence back, she will now raise her '*...shaking hand...*' and try to express what she thinks. Slogans like 'the more you learn the more you earn' do not sit well with Alyona who values education for personal growth. Of her university experience she says '*I'm proud of being in that tiny minority doing unusual course...[but]...you don't have to attend lectures, just download them from 'X-stream'...I don't think that's the way it should be...students should have a chance to get together and do something together...to know each other better...*'

In talking about her resilience Alyona refers to the Russian education system which is *'...hard, pressurised...very controlled...'* from which she has learnt the value of perseverance. However, with her UK experience she has also learnt that resilience is about the realisation that to accept something new you don't have to exclude something you've had before. *'...You don't have to stay away from people here to keep your friends at home...'* She goes on to say with thoughtfulness and a measure of profundity *'...if a person realises that, he [lifts] a lot of tension from his shoulders. If he opens to the world, the world will open to him. That's what I did.'*

Implications for learning, teaching, formal and informal curricula:

- Consider how we deploy VLEs in learning contexts and ensure that they are adequately complemented by learning in social/interactional space
- Particularly in relation to marketing strategies for programmes of study, take account of the different values and beliefs attached to education within a diverse student body
- Design curricula which provide the open space to allow students to share these different values and beliefs and individual motivations for studying

**Anna's story: 'Well, it's about being able to handle what is thrown at you.'**

Anna is a 23 years old woman from the South of England who came to Yorkshire to study for an MA in Social Policy. Born to an English father and an American mother, she spent much of her teenage years in both countries and undertakes frequent family trips overseas. Anna describes her hometown and school environment as socially diverse but rather mono-cultural in terms of ethnicities and/or minority groups. A passionate traveller, she finds that her curiosity for different countries and cultures as well as an extended volunteering trip to South America were influential in her decision to study Social Policy.

From an early age, and unlike her siblings, Anna always had high ambitions to pursue a career in Higher Education and had both high expectations and anxieties when she finally enrolled at university. She describes herself as being generally nervous when it comes to such transitions: *'...when I move to the next level I always think: oh my goodness, it's the hardest thing I've ever done ...it's so difficult and it's so hard.'* From the first year at university Anna got involved as a student representative and hugely enjoyed working with students from different social, national and cultural backgrounds and all degree levels. She thinks that this experience has made her a more *'confident'* and *'vocal'* person and has *'woken her up'* to see the various problems that home and international students encounter in the course of their studies. Actively engaged in student representation, and described by her peers as *'the glue that keeps the group together'*, Anna also set up a charitable Student Society and organised events to promote and support women's rights; at the time of writing, she is still involved in volunteering work for a local young offenders' social service. During her Masters course, she also befriended a number of international students whom she has invited home to the south of England for weekend trips.

Used to being successful and coping well in her course, Anna had a critical experience when working for her course assignments at Masters level. Anxious about not achieving well and missing coursework deadlines, she started to doubt her academic abilities, felt down and unhappy and temporarily suffered from panic attacks. Not being taken seriously by local doctors, she actively sought help from the free university counselling service which helped her overcome what she describes as *'scary'* feelings of pressure, low self-esteem and anxiety.

For Anna, resilience is being able *'...to handle what is thrown at you'* and to find coping mechanisms in unprecedented moments of crisis. She also thinks that sharing these critical moments and experiences with friends and peers are extremely helpful for neutralising and overcoming self-doubt. Anna says that her parents are *'like a rock'* to her and helped her through stressful situations both emotionally and financially. Leisure time activities and hobbies such as running, watching movies as well as meditations help her to maintain balance and cope with stress. Retrospectively, Anna cherishes the possibilities that have opened up for her since she came to university such as *'meeting different people'*, *'learn[ing] about different issues'* and a myriad of possibilities to *'get involved'* such as student representation and societies, social or voluntary work, etc. She believes her experiences at university have made her not only more self-confident but also *'more accepting'* of other

people and other opinions, and she finds that her many extra-curricular activities were hugely beneficial for her Social Policy studies and vice versa.

Implications for learning, teaching, formal and informal curricula:

- Mostly focussing on minority group or 'disadvantaged' student cohorts, literature has missed out on how 'high achievers' cope with adversity and emotional stress. Anna's account suggests we might be more alert to this group providing support when needed.
- Linked to the first bullet point, Anna's story underscores the vital role of counselling and other support services on campus
- Involvement in student bodies (SU, societies, etc.) can be beneficial to the personal and professional development of individuals and enable students' to reach out and to cross cultural boundaries. Making students aware of the broad range of these possibilities is paramount in induction and university entry stages.
- Anna's decision to openly share her course-related problems is honest and courageous. Although this belongs to the realm of friendships and the 'informal curriculum', HEIs could encourage engagement by providing social space for such meaningful interactions.

**Basimah's story: *'If I really want to go to university and graduate, get a degree, I have to try my best'***

Basimah is a young female student of British Asian background studying for a foundation degree at a further education college. From the age of eleven Basimah was sent to a Muslim boarding school, mixing only with other Muslim girls of her own age. Basimah admits that this, combined with her low self-confidence, contributed to difficulties in interacting with people who are different to her and in making friends in her first semester at college. She had felt safe and sheltered at boarding school and did not feel ready to face the outside world of university and work. When she did not get into her first choice of university this further dented her confidence.

At college Basimah has faced difficulties getting used to independent study and with finding sources and materials for her assignments. She is also the first in her family to study for a university degree and sometimes finds it hard explaining to her parents what she is going through. To deal with these difficulties Basimah has drawn heavily on her determination to succeed. She believes it is her responsibility to work hard at making things happen and, recognising her own strengths and weaknesses, she has chosen a course with minimal exams as she prefers and gets better grades in assignments and course work. She also recognises that when things get difficult she has to *'go with the flow'*, get through the difficult situation and she will be able to come out at the other end able to move on. She recognises that this takes strength but believes she is a strong person.

In addition, Basimah's religious faith is very important to her, believing it gives her the necessary grounding and boundaries to stay on the *'right path'*. Her family are a strong pillar for her and she knows that they will support her all the way, even if they do not understand themselves exactly what she is going through. Friends from the course and from outside, as well as hobbies such as reading are also a huge support to Basimah, letting her forget about the pressures of college and just relax. She now feels that interacting with different people at college has allowed her to develop personally by creating the opportunity to form a wider circle of friends and has broadened her horizons about the world. In addition, at college she knows that her tutors are always accessible and will help if Basimah has any problems, for example with preparation for presenting in front of the group.

Despite the difficulties she has encountered Basimah feels that her first year at college has made her a much stronger person. She has applied again to her first choice university to study after her foundation year and has established a goal, once she has completed her degree, of leaving the city where she has lived most of her life and moving to London.

Implications for learning, teaching, formal and informal curricula:

- Provide spaces and opportunities for interaction within the formal and informal curriculum
- Provide information in induction sessions focussing on potential difficulties in students' transition from secondary to higher education
- Encourage parents' and families' participation in students' pathway through university (i.e. open days)
- Importance of tutor's presence and personal encouragement when student faces difficulties
- Provide information about opportunities to engage in Student Associations and groups (i.e. related to faith, etc.)

**Bernie's story: *'people need banter...don't be self-contained...sometimes the protection that saves you from the world also cuts you out of it...'***

Bernie was born the son of a Jewish mother and Irish father. He speaks of always being *'...aware of two different worlds...'* *'...the Jewish boy in the gentile world and then the gentile boy in the Jewish world...'* He reflects on the joys and tensions of existing in two worlds: *'My mother...she got me into tap dancing as a boy, I loved it! At about eight I was told that the next step was ballet, I went to one lesson but knew it wasn't for me, not for the working-class boy, that wasn't going to fit!'* Bernie goes on to reflect *'...My father was brought up in the slums, was beaten because he was left-handed...he was a Tory but the kindest man you could hope to meet...'* Bernie says that in his early life he very much tended towards the warmth of the Jewish side of his family *'...but I began to grow away from all that with the Six Days War...'*

Bernie's career in education began many years ago teaching in a Further Education college, although he has worked in HE for a number of years assuming leadership roles in that context. Becoming involved in politics, writing and editing publications Bernie found that redundancy brought a new opportunity to teach politics to trade unionists. He describes his students *'...they were robust, working class guys who were eager to learn – the straight lecture doesn't work in that setting...'* A subsequent involvement with students in youth and community work who were rather less politically motivated prompted Bernie to re-think *'...I would start with say the disability movement, talking about movements seemed to capture their interest then I'd get onto the issues of politics, representation etc...'*

Bernie maintains that the need to think of different ways of teaching for different groups is as relevant today as it always was - not only adjusting classroom content for diversity, but connecting with students' lives. *'... Trying to get them beyond just reproducing knowledge can be frustrating ...but it's more important for you to do something that engages them ...before they write essays, they need to write about something that evokes their feelings...'* Many students resent group work and role play provides an alternative way of helping students to understand predicaments, circumstances etc. *'... it's not all about essays and presentations there should be room for multiple intelligences...'*

Bernie goes on to cite a particular module which is about body and movement in Western and African contexts in which students begin to understand that the very way we move is rooted in different cultural traditions. Living dance is the common framework in which to open up issues which, for Bernie, might otherwise be *'... dry, not engaging and not immediately relevant...'* Whilst focusing on dance the module covers class, ethnicity, sexuality, identity, creativity and it values communities that have not always been valued. It also shows how cultural heritage is exploited (Hip Hop, Rap etc.)

Bernie is clear about the student – teacher relationship: *'...I don't want their opinion I want their judgement...you give of your best to them and they give of their best too...[but] it is they who have made themselves or re-made themselves – they do it... it helps to reveal a bit of*

*yourself so yes, I talk about myself as the first of three generations who didn't go to Europe with a bayonet in my hand when trying to enable students to understand the post-war world and the opportunities there were. Telling it through the personal is good, we are social beings and if you want them to reflect on their experience you need to show it too...'*

Bernie has supported his students through many issues within the family and their personal lives – domestic abuse, alcoholism, supporting siblings in prison, disabilities etc. and a key resilient trait is motivation '*...if you go through an ordeal, if you live under a regime where there's no democracy you value the opportunity to...express yourself, to learn freely...it's a big adjustment... to come here, but...they got away, they broke out... that's positive...for home students some of them have found distance too, many have really had it hard...'*

Bernie concludes '*...we need to work on social inclusion '...not everybody belongs...'* and '*It all has to come together – colleagues, student liaison, disability team...they're all involved.'*

Implications for learning, teaching, formal and informal curricula:

- Personal biography(both teacher and student) is a potentially powerful tool for engaging learning in the classroom
- Curricula can be brought to life if explored via aesthetic media (appealing to the senses and emotions rather than pure intellectuality) like music, dance, drama etc.
- Role play can engage both the intellect and the emotions in a spirit of spontaneity which allows mistakes to be made in a non-threatening environment
- Curriculum is not static. It should be sufficiently flexible and adaptable to enable new directions and approaches based on student cohort profiles
- Inclusion in HE contexts requires the development of synergies across professional contexts

**Chenzira's story: *'Now I'm here and when I go back I will be going back as a different person altogether'***

Chenzira, an African man in his early thirties, is studying Politics as an undergraduate at a UK university. Having worked as a primary school teacher in his home country, Chenzira came to England five years ago *'because of political reasons'*; his active engagement in a political reform movement during his teacher training and his membership of an opposition party in his homeland had put his life under threat and prompted his decision to flee the country. Chenzira's motivation to study politics is best expressed in his own words: *'...I think it will help me contribute to the politics of our country in some way whether at grassroots level, whatever level...'* He recalls early experience of political life in his village *'...we were quite important in the countryside when it comes to...every five years the election time when politicians come to look for support... that's when we see...no arguments...everything is accepted. Come the day after, a week after the election nobody comes...the roads they used to come to the place become, ...damaged, potholes, whatever. You don't see anybody repairing them. They'll only be repaired towards election period.'*

Complementary to his course and eager to extend his practical knowledge about politics, Chenzira repeatedly applied for a placement in local organisations working with refugee communities in a major UK city but was rejected due to organisational restructuring and bureaucratic obstacles. His initial worries about not 'fitting in' a mostly younger group of students were soon dissolved as he did not encounter any form of exclusion or discrimination in terms of group work activities or discussions. Chenzira also joined the university's Politics society and maintains friendship relationships with other African students in his university city.

In Chenzira's view, the biggest challenge is *'...mixing work and study and having bills to pay and...having to think of family...'* He argues that having to constantly balance work and study negatively affects his academic performance and does not provide enough time to work towards better grades. Both within and outside the classroom, Chenzira observes a general 'openness' to and interest in his personal, national and political background, although he thinks that his maturity prevents him from socialising with his colleagues outside the classroom. Resilience, to Chenzira, is about standing up to any challenges, to be open to new things while capitalising on successes and positive achievements of one's past: *'... I went through a lot and to find myself here in this time it's a kind of show of strength in me because there are so many challenges which...could have brought me down, ...but here I am.'* He is also convinced that his own story of resilience against political oppression, poverty or discrimination, etc. will inspire other people with a similar background and help to make a difference upon his possible return to his home country: *'I think I will be able to contribute meaningfully to the cause of... my people, people of my background...I will also be telling them to...be resilient and stand up to the challenges of life, not just cry but to try and put more effort into making a difference with your life.'*

Implications for learning, teaching, formal and informal curricula:

- Opportunities to embed authentic and lived narratives of political engagement and activism in the politics (and related social science) curricula
- Need to foster university links with local organisations, community groups, etc. and to de-bureaucratise work opportunities, internships, placements for *all* students
- Generate opportunities and formats to enhance communication and knowledge exchange between young and 'mature students'
- Fair acknowledgement of work-study imbalances/pressures some students have to face; i.e. providing extension opportunities, assignment alternatives, etc.

### **Dena's story: *'Resilience is like being an elastic band'***

Dena is an experienced lecturer who has worked at a further education college for approximately 7 years. She left school with few qualifications working in a range of jobs before marrying and having children. When her marriage broke down Dena decided to return to college and gained a degree, eventually moving into teaching.

Dena's experiences as a mature student mean that she understands some of the challenges faced by students in adapting to university and dealing with the personal and academic difficulties that they might have, including family expectations and social class. Her experiences have also led her to recognise the impact that low self-confidence and poor attainment in the first few assignments can have. Some of Dena's students have caring responsibilities at home, others have physical or learning disabilities, or are struggling to manage on very low incomes all of which present a range of challenge and threats to their continuation at college. Dena is also concerned that some students from particular ethnic or religious backgrounds are unwilling to voice opinions in class that are contrary to that of their classmates and that many of them perceive that they will face discrimination because they are studying for their degree in a college not a university.

For Dena resilient students are those able to be flexible and stretch without breaking, much like an elastic band, and can keep going through external adversity and their own personal fears. Dena recognises the importance of students developing their resilience, thus enabling them to cope when faced by adversity. She sees high levels of resilience within many of her students including an ability to understand their own and each other's behaviour, to continue to hope and to remain motivated. Amongst those students from lower income groups, Dena also sees how they regard being given an opportunity to study is a privilege, and that it can help them improve their circumstances.

Dena uses her own experience to aid her students in developing their resilience. In order to assist them she helps them understand what is expected of them academically and, more importantly, how to go about achieving this, for example showing students how to break up assignments into manageable tasks and adapting resources for students who need more support. She ensures that she is discrete in aiding students with learning, language or other difficulties which may affect their academic work by making clear that all the resources used in the classes are available online or in the library so that students can revisit them. In effect she provides support without making it obvious so as to avoid stigmatisation in the classroom. Dena also believes firmly in personal tutoring and students having the same tutors throughout their academic journey enabling meaningful relationships to be built between staff and students. Staff accessibility is important in allowing students to open up about difficulties without feeling criticised or challenged in an unconstructive manner.

Implications for learning, teaching, formal and informal curricula:

- Encourage tutors to go beyond mere knowledge transfer towards recognising individual strengths and weaknesses among students which help them to develop critical and resilient thinking
- Encourage individual-focussed and discrete approaches to teaching in order to provide a class room environment built on trust and mutual respect
- Potential of exchanging 'coping' resources and personal resilience strategies between tutors and students to break down hegemonic student-teacher barriers and build relationships which are based on trust, empathy and mutual respect

**Erdem's story: *'I knew this was a different culture and this is the point. I'm here...to learn more and...to make another way of looking and seeing and solving problems.'***

Erdem is a Turkish student in his early thirties with a background in International Relations and Political Science who came to a UK university to study for a PhD in religious ethics. Born into a working-class background and raised in a rural Turkish village, Erdem went to what he calls a *'traditional Islamic school'* for five years, followed by secondary education in a highly reputed private college where he was granted a bursary and which, in his own words, provided a *'stepping stone'* to higher education. A trip to the United States during his undergraduate course nurtured his career ambitions and encouraged him apply for a PhD abroad.

Starting his PhD Erdem felt some pressure to understand and adapt to the new academic environment and education system, which compared to post-graduate education in Turkey, assumes greater student autonomy within less formal working relationships but - in his opinion - often lacks critical oral debate across cultures, understanding about non-Western literatures, and specific topic-related background knowledge particularly on the part of supervisors. This is why Erdem has maintained links with a Turkish advisory team.

Although he values his personal autonomy and responsibility, Erdem feels that he was not appropriately *'introduced'* into what for him is a new, and in many ways different, academic culture. Unlike many of his Turkish friends studying in UK higher education, Erdem was eager to overcome initial language difficulties and sought active engagement in social and academic networks such as the Postgraduate Student Society and Islamic Society at his university. Accustomed to a vibrant social life back in Turkey, Erdem is challenged by relative social seclusion and professional anonymity, what he describes as *'...nobody knows what you have been through or...what kind of person you are and what you are capable of and what you are not capable of...it's like being born 25 years old...'* Frequently feeling as a *'stranger'*, unable to negotiate culturally-defined social and work-related conventions as well as different forms of gender relations, it took a long time for Erdem to befriend non-Muslim British people and the majority of his local friends continue to be from the British Muslim community.

For Erdem, resilience in a culturally diverse environment is about caution, comparing and trying to understand one's own and others' positions as well as to be honest and upright when it comes to dealing with crisis and conflict both professionally and socially. Most importantly, resilience is about cultural exchange, discussing and learning about the self and the other by contextualizing one's own opinions and values. Likewise, resilience means avoiding the retreat into one's own personal, cultural and professional (i.e. academic) comfort zone. Reflecting on his three-years' experience as a PhD student in the UK, Erdem believes that an open and inquisitive attitude has been beneficial in adapting his mind-set and that listening to and accepting different perspectives has enriched his development and opened up relationships with others without losing his own sense of cultural belonging or religious identity.

Implications for learning, teaching, formal and informal curricula:

- Provide effective induction opportunities for postgraduate research students. Whilst there are a number of initiatives for undergraduate students across UK HEIs, this area is often overlooked in relation to the PhD student experience.
- University student associations can be instrumental in enhancing language skills, providing social space and supporting both cross-cultural and academic interaction.
- Operating in and between two different academic traditions is a useful resilient trait which should be encouraged through academic exchange between teachers/supervisors in the UK and abroad. This can in turn, can lead to sustainable academic collaborations and partnerships in other areas (i.e. research projects, academic exchange programmes, placements, etc.)
- Understanding, openness, and acknowledgement and integration of non-Western literatures and learning processes is critical, particularly within the PhD process.

**Jeanice's story: 'My personal principle is that for every bad situation I try to dig in and see what is good'**

Jeanice is a mature Black-African woman, currently studying for a foundation degree in Criminology at a Further Education College. When civil war broke out in her home country she fled with her two daughters, in the process becoming separated from all other members of her family, including her parents. She gave birth to her third daughter two days before crossing the border, at which point her husband abandoned the family to live with another woman leaving Jeanice alone with her children. She was eventually granted asylum in the UK and is now bringing up her daughters on her own, one of whom has significant mental health issues and learning disabilities. In her home country Jeanice had gained a degree and was working as a teacher. However, on arrival in the UK she found that her qualifications weren't recognised and that she needed to retrain if she wanted to teach. Unable to find any other form of employment, and struggling to survive on state benefits, Jeanice decided to return to college. Indeed, her experience with physical and psychological violence both in Africa and the UK influenced her decision to study Criminology.

As a mature, part-time student, Jeanice has struggled to fit in with her full-time younger peers. She is also the only ethnic minority student on her course and, because her first language is not English, she has experienced difficulties with both academic and social communication. In addition, having caring responsibilities for three children has meant that not only does Jeanice sometimes have to miss classes but she also finds it hard to be involved socially with the other students outside the course. Despite these difficulties Jeanice is determined to take responsibility for the situation she finds herself in. She is taking active steps to improve her job prospects including working in community organisations both on a temporary and a voluntary basis to become better integrated into her local community and to improve her English skills. Keeping in contact with compatriots who have also found themselves relocated to the UK and having been able to re-establish contact with her parents also provides Jeanice with significant support. In addition, her tutors allow Jeanice the flexibility to be at home for her children, and have actively introduced her to other students who have since become firm friends.

In addition, Jeanice recognises that difficult situations can provide her with an opportunity to evaluate circumstances critically and see what can be done to avoid such challenges in the future. For Jeanice being resilient means seeing the good in every situation, and remembering that *'without the bad it is harder to appreciate the good'* and what really helps Jeanice to be resilient is putting her own problems in perspective compared to those of others and accepting the situation she finds herself in. In addition, from her own experiences growing up in Africa, Jeanice has a strong appreciation of the positive role education can have in people's lives and draws on this to help her *'get through'* her degree.

Implications for learning, teaching, formal and informal curricula:

- Potential for using personal experience and narrative for discussing aspects of conflict and violence in the classroom in appreciative thematic/subject frameworks
- Work-and community-based learning in criminology and/or related disciplines through the engagement with minority groups, migrant workers, asylum seekers, offenders, etc.
- Sensitivity towards 'integrating' students with 'part time', 'single mother' or 'minority' status
- Role of community involvement and voluntary work as a means to improve language skills and job prospects

**Katrijn's story: *'Regardless of your situation you have to make the most of it and just be positive'***

Katrijn is a student in her early twenties from a white African background studying for a Masters degree in social policy. Privately educated she led what she describes as a *'sheltered life'*, moving to the UK with her family when the situation in her country of birth started becoming more dangerous - her parents' family business was broken into and her father was hijacked at gun point.

Starting secondary school part way through the year when she was thirteen, and fitting in with her peers, presented problems including feelings of social isolation stemming from not knowing the childhood cultural reference points of her classmates and also having to deal with *'racist'* behaviour. Leaving school and moving to university presented more challenges, for example living with *'unpleasant'* housemates and what she perceived as a constraint on creative thinking in her undergraduate degree. Katrijn continues to face new challenges within her current student life: she had to take a career development loan and the pressure of needing to find a job immediately after she graduates in order to afford the repayments weighs heavily on her mind. In addition she has struggled through depression and had to cope with family illnesses and perennial financial uncertainty.

Perhaps because of the challenges she has faced and overcome Katrijn regards herself as a resilient person, more so than English people of her age. Her childhood experiences of growing up in a volatile society have instilled in her a positive mindset, enabling her to *'go with the flow'*. Because of this she doesn't worry too much commenting that *'when I make massive decisions they don't seem like big ones'*. Katrijn also considers that being independent and having confidence in herself are highly important and she believes that these internal resources stem from her experience of changing cultures and travelling around Asia in her gap year where she learned she was able to be self-reliant.

Katrijn's family are hugely significant in her life and have always believed that she will be successful. She sees her immediate family as a team and is spurred on by the thought that getting her MA will enable her eventually to look after her family should the need arise. Her friends have also been a steady source of support and her current course-mates encourage her to achieve much more than she did as an undergraduate. In addition, the diversity of people on her course allows her to gain an insight into different cultures, finding this useful for the global aspect of some modules. The enthusiasm of the tutors also creates a positive learning atmosphere and Katrijn has found that even modules she thought would be dull excite her academically. The bond between students and tutors also encourages Katrijn to actively seek out new information to contribute to the tutors' knowledge base, in the process widening and deepening her own understanding of the topic.

Implications for learning, teaching, formal and informal curricula:

- Allow space for creative thinking at all levels
- Responsibility of institutions and tutors to generate awareness of financial advice and support mechanisms at university to alleviate pressure and reinforce learning focus
- Stimulate positive learning and teaching environment by using multiple cultural perspectives and experiences that suit the curriculum content/course trajectory
- Encourage mutual exchange of information and material between tutor and student

***Nadia's story: Before, I was always afraid of the world. Now I'm starting to open up slowly'***

Nadia is an international, mature student from Asia who moved to the United Kingdom when her husband began studying for a PhD here. She is now studying for a Master's degree in social policy. To begin with Nadia did not wish to leave her home where she had lived all her life, and the move made her feel like a 'fish out of water'. She initially found it tough adapting to life in the UK while looking after her husband and daughter.

Starting studying again after illness cut short previous MA study was another pressure in her busy life. However, Nadia has a strong motivation to pursue her MA because she had a strongly academic upbringing and a family tradition of academic high achievement. She knows that by completing her study she will stand a better chance of getting a skilled job. She has a strong ability to study independently and think critically, developing these skills through study in her home country where such attributes are encouraged. This prior learning experience means that she anticipated few problems fitting in with the British postgraduate study culture and found the academic work relatively easy.

Nadia takes responsibility for making the best of everyday challenges by adopting small but very practical solutions, such as buying a city map to know her way around and trying to join in with typical British celebrations. Her experiences of migration have helped prepare her in her MA course which deals with social policy on a global scale.

However, Nadia had experienced a traumatic and isolated childhood that made it hard for her to meet and trust new people easily and, although she did not find the academic work of university difficult, one assignment brought back childhood memories that she struggled to deal with. These memories began increasingly to interfere with work and family life. The university counselling service has allowed Nadia to begin to deal with the deep-seated traumas of her past and she now finds it easier to interact socially. Nadia is now making close friends and is beginning to realise a social life with them, knowing that she can confide in them about any problems.

Family and religion are also highly important in Nadia's life and when faced with difficulties she believes that God has kept her going. She also keeps in regular contact with family and friends back home via Skype which reminds her that she will one day return to them. Her role as a wife and mother has also encouraged her to stay strong during the difficult first years – after all she had a family to support. Reflecting back on the last couple of years Nadia believes that she has become a very resilient person. Learning from tragedy and knowing that each problem overcome and lesson learnt opens the door to a better future have helped her to persist and to cope in the face of adversity.

Implications for learning, teaching, formal and informal curricula:

- Raise awareness about university support facilities such as counselling services, chaplaincies, child care, etc.
- Possibility of introductory in-class reflections between international and home students on expectations and value of education across cultures
- Encourage collaborations between city councils, neighbourhood groups, tourist boards and universities to enhance diverse students' experience.