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The Post-Lecture
Tête-à-Tête:

A Teaching Practice for Fostering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Higher Education

Over the past few years, there has been an exponential growth in enrollment in colleges and universities in the world. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in 2023, approximately 235 million students attended higher education institutions worldwide.[1] Higher education attainment for people 25 years of age and older continues to increase, and data indicate that, globally, many of the students enrolled in tertiary education can be considered nontraditional. Nontraditional students can be learners who delayed enrollment into postsecondary education (25 years of age or older), are enrolled part-time in college, maintain full-time employment, claim independent status on financial-aid applications, have dependent(s) other than a spouse, live as single parents, and did not complete a high school diploma.[2] Students with low socioeconomic status and those with minority backgrounds are also classified as nontraditional.[3]

Causal factors for the growth in college enrollment among nontraditional students include—but are not limited to—economic downturns like the Great Recession (people tend to pursue education in hopes of improving future job prospects),[4] competition from automation and artificial intelligence,[5] college aspirations, and family/life transitions.[6] Nontraditional adult learners face many obstacles to success, including juggling different roles (inter-role conflict),[7] lack of academic flexibility,[8] and isolation.[9] These result in lower retention and graduation rates.[10] Nontraditional students are less likely to avail themselves of faculty office hours than their traditional peers.[11]

Many universities have developed campus support services to assist nontraditional students, including extending faculty office hours,[12] adding library support,[13] and providing mentoring.[14] Moreover, most universities now offer distance education[15] and part-time enrollment options.[16] If received, campus support services can help students succeed in higher education.[17] However, as mentioned above, nontraditional students are often unable to utilize the services primarily designed for traditional students.

Purpose

Because existing campus-based services leave few opportunities for faculty to help students outside regular scheduling times, there is the potential for mismatched expectations between faculty and nontraditional students and the inability of students to get the help they need. This article presents the Post-Lecture Tête-à-Tête technique as a teaching approach that can help to address the needs of nontraditional students in higher education. The goal is to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion in postsecondary classrooms. A description of this technique—along with theoretical assumptions and connection to the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) framework—is provided below.

Diversity has been defined as "the sum of how people are alike and different." It also relates to *equity*, a process of "taking into account differences to ensure a fair process and, ultimately, a fair (or equitable) outcome," and (3) *inclusion*, "an environment in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully."[18]

Taken as a whole, diversity, equity, and inclusion constitute a conceptual framework that supports a level playing field for all individuals, particularly historically marginalized populations.[19] DEI has been used as a guiding framework for retention practices in higher education beginning in the 1960s in the United States, and expanding with each decade.[20]

Definition of Post-Lecture Tête-à-Tête

Post-lecture Tête-à-Tête (PLTT) combines two concepts: *post-lecture* and *tête-à-tête.* The first concept (post-lecture) indicates things that take place immediately after an instructional presentation in a higher education setting. The Latin prefix *post-* simply means "subsequent to" or "after." *Lecture* is any form of conversation, talk, or discourse that a faculty member or guest speaker leads in front of an academic audience—in this case, college and university students. Borrowed from French, the second concept (*tête-à-tête*) could literally be translated as "head-to-head." However, the broader meaning of the term would have been lost with this translation because "head-to-head" implies confrontation. Far from conveying a sense of confrontation, the Gallicism *tête-à-tête* involves a friendly, one-on-one dialogue between two people. In academia, PLTT refers to the conversation that occurs after class between a faculty and one or more students.

Post-Lecture Tête-à-Tête consists of brief content-focused meetings with students during the last 15 to 20 minutes of class and is designed for classes that last two or more hours. For various reasons, some students may hesitate to ask questions in class to avoid being perceived as unintelligent, especially when their peers appear to grasp the content of a lecture more quickly than they do. Instructors can allocate the final 15 to 20 minutes of class to the small number of students who desire more clarification regarding lectures and/or assignments. In some cases, faculty may choose to arrange office hours for these students or refer them to key campus resources.

It is true that nontraditional students have a history of not benefiting from campus services due to the reasons discussed earlier. However, there are cases where students face severe challenges to achieving academic success. Once aware of students' struggles (either through poor performance on assignments or via self-disclosure during PLTT), the instructor may recommend specific strategies and campus resources to enhance students' success. These may or may not include changes in students' daily routines to facilitate a smoother adaptation to college life.

Hence, PLTT allows instructors to better understand the pressing needs of students and more accurately determine how these needs can be successfully met. For example, an instructor might assign an academically fragile student to a group project where the student can benefit from working with peers. The same goes for a physically, mentally, or linguistically challenged student. It is incumbent upon the instructor to guarantee that every student has optimal opportunities to succeed.

Theoretical Assumptions

There are currently seven guiding principles or assumptions upon which PLTT relies. These assumptions are supported by the literature on modern andragogy (teaching practices that best support adult education), and webagogy (teaching practices that integrate online tools and technology resources). In no particular order, they can be listed as follows:

1. Nontraditional students face more academic barriers than their traditional counterparts.[21]

2. Nontraditional students remain an overlooked population throughout the existing higher educational system.[22] Colleges and universities need to provide students with more opportunities to achieve their highest potential. Such opportunities may come with higher costs, so pursing grants or fundraising for this specific purpose might be a necessary venture.[23]

3. Communication between faculty and students is key to academic success.[24]

4. One-on-one interactions between faculty and nontraditional students foster equity and inclusion in the classroom.[25]

5. PLTT is primarily designed for classes that last two or more hours.

6. In distance learning, PLTT is a better fit with synchronous delivery methods, although a blended version of synchronous and asynchronous approaches might also work well.[26] This assumption is consistent with Equivalency Theory, a seminal distance-education theory that

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says courses should provide equivalent learning experiences regardless of modality—synchronous or asynchronous—to be of benefit to the nontraditional learner.[27]

Connection With the Existing Theoretical Frameworks

With its focus on adult learners, many of whom are often taught online, PLTT mirrors the premises of andragogy and webagogy. In addition, by targeting primarily nontraditional students, this teaching intervention dovetails with the underlying principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

Connection With Andragogy

Andragogy, the art of teaching adult learners, is different from pedagogy, which has its roots in Greek and initially referred to the teaching of children ("paidos"—child and "agogos"—leader). Credited for the development of andragogy in the 1980s, American adult educator Malcolm Shepherd Knowles believed that adults gain, memorize, and retrieve information differently than children.[28] The literature on adult learning has identified six different assumptions about learning that can be expressed when associated with andragogy: self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, motivation, need to know, and learning approach.[29]

In general, adults are independent learners (self-concept), have life experiences that are relevant to the learning process (experience), are ready to learn things that carry real-life applications (readiness to learn), are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated (motivation), want to know the rationale for learning something (need to know), and respond better to problem-centered learning (learning approach). Knowles[30] argued that instructors play a key role in facilitating a student's movement toward self-directed learning. By facilitating frequent encounters be- tween the adult learner and the instructor, PLTT is arguably consistent with the andragogical framework, particularly the different ways adult learners engage with self-concept, readiness to learn, motivation, and need-to-know assumptions.
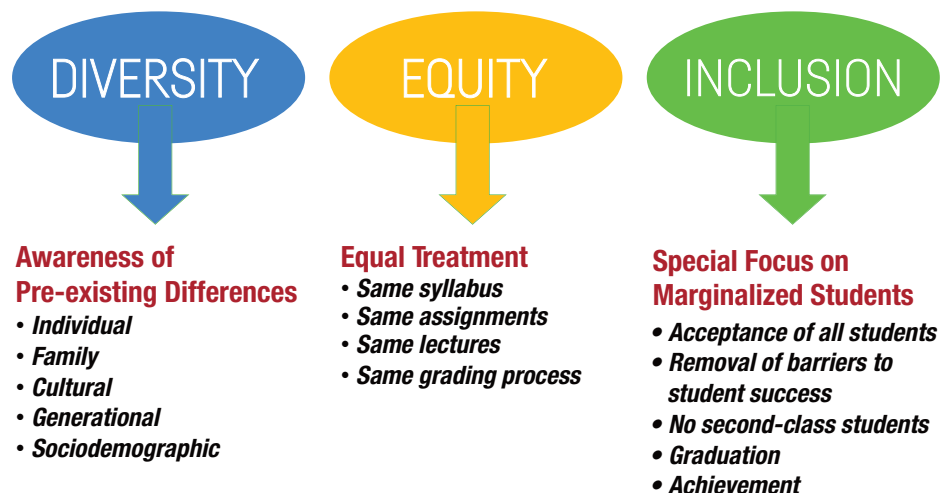
Connection With Webagogy

In simple terms, *web-agogy* refers to how teaching practices use online tools and technology to facilitate web-based learning.[31] This term is similar to *cybergogy*, which implies the use of technology in learning.[32] Over the past few decades, the brick-and-mortar educational system is slowly but steadily being replaced by distance education[33] and the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this process.[34] Appavoo created the acronym "TELEPHONE' to illustrate a webagogical approach: T = Tutoring; E = Experiential Learning; L = Leverage; E = Excitement; P = Peer; H = Harmony; O = Orientation; N = Neutral; and E = Engagement.[35] According to Appavoo, tutoring improves students' learning (T); students' own experience helps their learning process (E); technology creates/leverages learning opportunities (L); online course activities create excitement for students (E); students learn from their peers (P); online course activities harmonize learning (H); students appreciate orientation received in online learning (O); the neutrality of online platforms ensures that each student has a voice in a given course (N); and engagement is a fundamental part of learning (E). By being student-oriented, PLTT echoes five tenets of webagogy: tutoring, harmony, orientation, neutrality, and engagement.

Connections With Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The seven assumptions of PLTT pertain to the DEI paradigm. In this article, diversity represents differences among students; equity focuses on each student's specific needs; and inclusion deals with the removal of educational barriers so that students feel respected and accepted. Figure 1 below establishes the connection between the PLTT model and the DEI paradigm.

Figure 1. The Post-Lecture Tête-à-Tête Technique and the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Framework

DIVERSITY
Awareness of Pre-existing Differences
- *Individual*
- *Family*
- *Cultural*
- *Generational*
- *Sociodemographic*

EQUITY
Equal Treatment
- *Same syllabus*
- *Same assignments*
- *Same lectures*
- *Same grading process*

INCLUSION
Special Focus on Marginalized Students
- *Acceptance of all students*
- *Removal of barriers to student success*
- *No second-class students*
- *Graduation*
- *Achievement*

> Because of the pre-existing differences, some students start courses with major deficits that cause them to be marginalized. Therefore, the instructor has a moral obligation to provide additional assistance to these students in the form of academic or peer support.
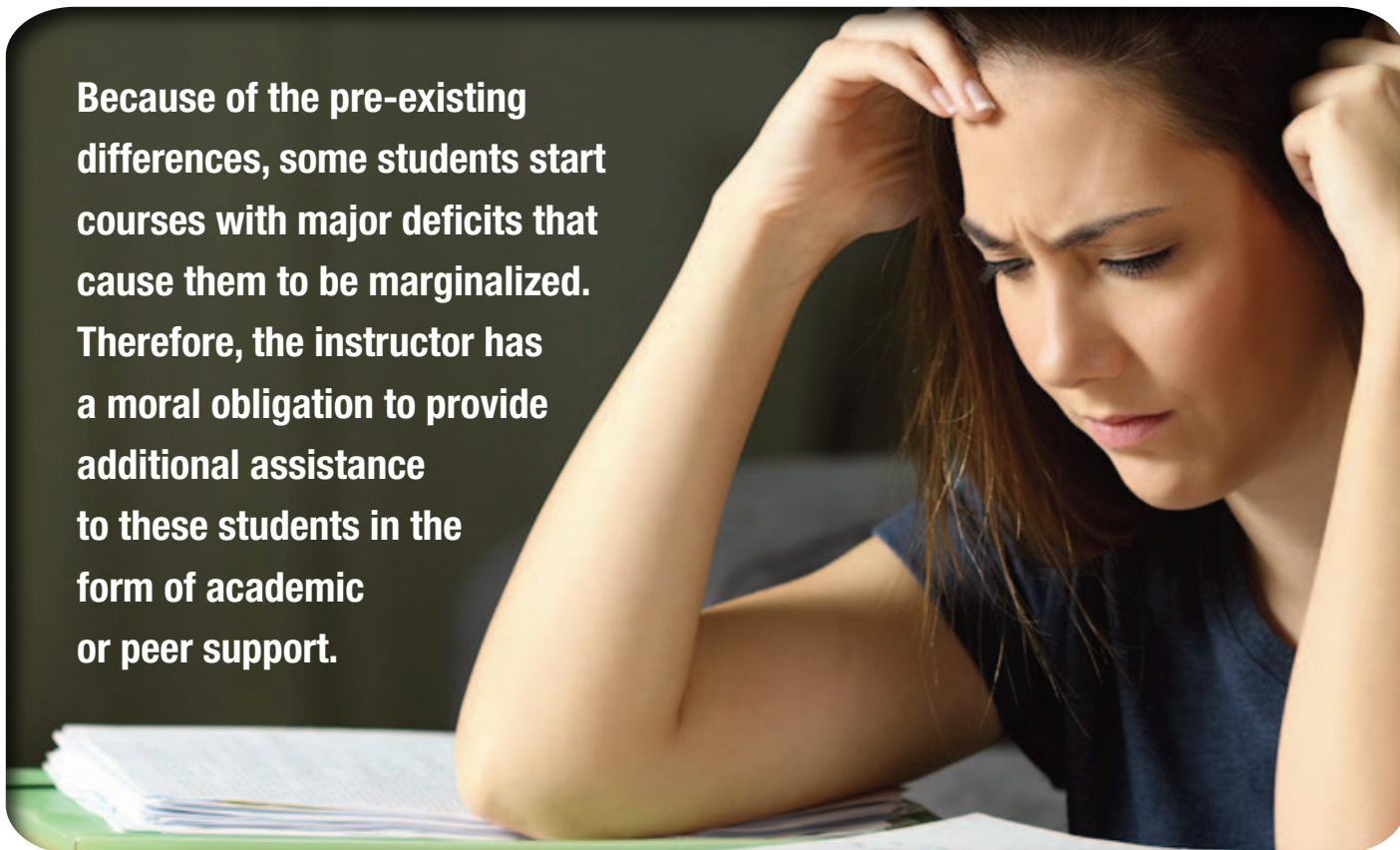
As displayed in Figure 1, in terms of diversity, instructors should be aware of pre-existing differences among the student population. These differences can be of an individual nature (e.g., student disability), a family nature (e.g., a student who is a parent), a cultural nature (e.g., a speaker of English as a second language), a generational nature (e.g., an older student or a first-generation immigrant student), as well as a socio-economic nature (e.g., a low-income student). Keeping these differences in mind is the first guiding principle of Post-Lecture Tête-à-Tête.

As the numbers of nontraditional students increase, instructors must recognize that these challenges will become more prevalent in classrooms.

Regarding equity, the playing field must be level for all students. This means that students who need support or additional resources can access them. While this is the ideal, the reality is that many schools, especially small private schools, do not have the funding to provide additional resources nor to support professional development and training for faculty to better serve students. Consequently, institutions have a responsibility to provide resources and support systems that can help instructors implement approaches such as PLTT. Within a university structure that provides support through the various student services, instructors are better able to level the playing field for their students. It is true that all students, by virtue of enrollment in a course, have automatic access to the same lectures, classroom activities, course materials (syllabus, assignments, etc.), and grading patterns. However, because of the pre-existing differences described above, some students start courses with major deficits that cause them to be marginalized. Therefore, the instructor has a moral obligation to provide additional assistance to these students in the form of academic support or peer support. With its fourth and fifth assumptions, PLTT reflects the equity aspect of the DEI framework.

Finally, at the inclusion level, institutions must provide instructors with the necessary equipment, training, and financial and technical support needed to ensure potential barriers to student success are removed. This requires collaboration between administration and instructional staff. Through frequent contact with the instructor and participation in group work, nontraditional college students can become empowered. Once empowered, these students are

more likely to complete courses successfully. A true educator does not settle for preparing second-class students, defined here as those who cannot graduate on time and/or are not eligible for graduate school due to low GPAs. All students, regardless of their socio-economic conditions, should be afforded a chance to perform at the same level as their peers. This will be possible only if there is a genuine effort to help them successfully negotiate the many barriers they face. Post-Lecture Tête-à-Tête is based on the idea that the instructor has something to offer in this regard. Because it is designed to improve educational outcomes for students, PLTT clearly reflects the DEI framework.

Discussion and Implications

The PLTT framework is limited in that teachers may not be able to implement its assumptions in asynchronous environments. This is a major concern because many nontraditional students have enrolled in asynchronous programs, a situation that was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.[36] Faculty working in online, asynchronous environments need to interact with students in a timely manner, namely via e-mail, text, WhatsApp, and various online platforms such as Zoom, WebEx, or GoogleChat.[37] However, some faculty, due to their limited technology skills and resources, may experience difficulties implementing the intervention in an asynchronous environment. In such a scenario, a blended version of synchronous and asynchronous methods is advisable.[38]

Despite the aforementioned limitations, this article has potential implications for the DEI paradigm. The paradigm advocates for the educational well-being of all students, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds or other difficulties. The existing scholarship has shown the limitations of campus-based programs designed to help marginalized students. This article proposes Post-Lecture Tête-à-Tête as an important tool for diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education. Indeed, PLTT constitutes a new tool in an instructor's arsenal of pedagogical resources. It provides instructors with an additional opportunity to

assess and meet the academic needs of their students. Once securing one-on-one contact with a student, the instructor will be able to determine how to be more helpful. This may include solving the issue(s) for which the student sought help in the first place, assigning the student to the right team for group projects, and, if needed, encouraging the student to use faculty office hours, library support, and other on-campus services.

While implementation of PLTT is important, it is just one form of one-on-one interaction between faculty and students. Communication between faculty and student matters, and can occur in many different settings.[39] Studies have shown the importance of faculty-student interaction both inside the classroom[40] and outside the classroom.[41] Such interaction enhances academic outcomes for students, including those from underprivileged backgrounds.[42] That is because faculty/student relations/interactions promote diversity and inclusion in the classroom.[43] As a variant of faculty-student engagement, PLTT is not new. However, previous research has not focused on this strategy.

The description, assumptions, and theoretical connection of the proposed model provide ways for future research to assess its practicability and effectiveness. Hence, this article calls on postsecondary instructors and administrations to implement the model in various settings and to evaluate its effectiveness, and to document their findings through rigorous research. Instructors and administrators (and researchers) who wish to do so can choose course grades, timely graduation rates, or eligibility for graduate studies as possible outcome variables and Post-Lecture Tête-à-Tête as an intervention. Using quasi-experimental designs, future work can compare educational outcomes between students who participate in PLTT sessions (nontraditional students) and those who do not receive this intervention. Educational researchers could also use third-party instructors to interview PLTT-receiving students about their perception of the intervention and the extent to which the program has contributed to their success.

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Conclusion

This article seeks to target a global audience. In effect, although the existing scholarship on nontraditional students comes primarily from developed countries, particularly the United States, it can be argued that the concepts discussed in this article (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Post-Lecture Tête-à-Tête) are international in nature. First, nontraditional students are found across multiple educational settings—whether public or private, large or small, affluent or non-affluent, urban or rural, campus-based or online, faith-based or secular. Second, DEI is a topic with no geographical boundaries. Even in places less demographically diverse (compared to the United States), the student body at colleges and universities is arguably not monolithic. There are differences among them in terms of age, gender, socioeconomic status, parental status, employment status, etc. Third, the potential usefulness and applicability of PLTT as a pedagogical technique can be worldwide. That is, it is likely that educators, regardless of cultural background, could successfully implement this intervention for the benefit of their students.

This article seeks to inform Adventist professors teaching in both Adventist and non-Adventist colleges and universities. The Seventh-day Adventist Church maintains a global educational presence with 118 tertiary institutions and 141,115 students.[44] Hence, using the Adventist educational audience as a fulcrum, this article aims to reach a broad range of stakeholders, specifically the ultimate target population of higher education faculty, including those who are non-Adventist, non-Christian, non-religious, and non-theist. ✎

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