

Title: **Using vignettes to address stereotypes and preconceptions about students**

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Reflect on the preconceptions they may have about students and challenge common stereotypes
- Improve the support they provide to students by focusing on the individual
- Use vignettes to tackle troublesome issues

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

Human evolution may owe its success to our ability to detect and remember patterns, this ability may have aided our survival when it leads to speedy recognition of dangerous situations (Shermer 2011). However this same ability, can detract from the ideal tutor-student interaction if our willingness to form preconceptions and rely on stereotypes prevents us from identifying individual characteristics (McGarty et al 2002). This workshop aims to address some of the more commonly held preconceptions about students, in particular, aspects that aid or hinder student success, to support teachers in addressing the actual needs of students, particularly in the first year of undergraduate study, rather than their perceived needs. The workshop is based on an international research study with lecturers and first year students in the US and UK.

Using a combination of research findings and contributions from participants, we will explore the benefits and disadvantages of stereotypes, looking first at stereotypes that others may make about ourselves, before turning our attention to our own preconceptions.

Using a vignette based on data from the research project, participants will take part in an exercise to examine common stereotypes and possible misconceptions.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

00 to 0.10 Participants engage in an exercise designed to focus on stereotypes others may form about them (combined ice breaker and introduction to the key issues)

0.10 to 0.20 A presentation about the reasons why we have preconceptions, why stereotypes can be useful but also why they are potentially dangerous. This will be supported with findings from an international research study into the beliefs held by HE lecturers in the UK and US (Popovic and Green 2012).

0.20 to 0.40 Participants engage in an exercise using vignettes based on authentic students, designed to help them question and challenge commonly held beliefs about students.

0.40 to 0.45 Question and Answer session, and evaluation.

References

McGarty, C., Spears, R. and Yzerbyt, V.Y. (2002) Conclusion: stereotypes are selective, variable and contested explanations. In C. McGarty, V.Y. Yzerbyt and R. Spears (eds) *Stereotypes as explanations: The formation of meaningful beliefs about social groups* (pp.186–99). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Popovic, C. and Green, D. (2012) *Understanding Undergraduates: challenging our preconceptions of student success*, London and New York, Routledge.

Shermer, M. (2011) *The believing brain*. New York: Times Books.