BEHAVIOURAL ENGAGEMENT IS GOOD, BUT HOLISTIC IS BETTER: A REVIEW OF ACADEMICS’ UNDERSTANDINGS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

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Quiz 1: What is student engagement?

A. Students talking in class
B. Students listening quietly
C. Students logging on to the Learning management system
D. Students participating in online discussions
E. Students liking things on Facebook
F. Students tweeting about the subject
G. Students doing well on the exam
H. All of the above
I. None of the above
J. H and I
Quiz 2: How would you improve student engagement?

A. Can’t help it if students don’t want to be involved, they have busy lives
B. Give students incentives to participate (e.g. marks)
C. Mandate class attendance
D. Bribe students with food
E. Introduce newfangled technology
F. Make sure my slides have animations
G. Flip the classroom
Quiz 3: How would you measure your students’ engagement?

A. Check their marks
B. Do a survey
C. Get a decibel reader for the classroom
D. Look at the SETU/Evaluate results
E. Check for comments on Facebook
F. Get my learning analytics mate to check the LMS data
G. Employ a research assistant to observe the class
Definitions

Engage (verb)

1. [with object] Occupy or attract (someone's interest or attention)
   1.1 (engage someone in) Involve someone in (a conversation or discussion)

2. engage with [no object] Participate or become involved in.
   2.1 (engage with) Establish a meaningful contact or connection with.

3. (with reference to a part of a machine or engine) move into position so as to come into operation.

4. [with object] (of fencers or swordsmen) bring (weapons) together preparatory to fighting.

Oxford Dictionary, 2017
What the does the literature say about student engagement?

Kahu (2013) identifies four relatively distinct approaches:

- Behavioural
- Psychological
- Socio-cultural
- Holistic (draws above strands together)

Other conceptualisations

- Flow (McCoy et al 2016)
- Work engagement: vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli et al 2006)
Perspectives on engagement & their measures

**Behavioural perspective**

‘time and effort students devote to educationally purposeful activities’
(Kahu 2013 quoting ACER 2010)

Measured through:
- Surveys
- Actions
- Online traces (eg clickstreams)

**Psychological perspective**

Includes behaviour, cognition, emotion/affect, +/-conation

Measured through:
- Attendance, time on task, questions asking, participation
- Self-regulated/deep learning strategies
- Enjoyment, interest, belonging

Kahu 2013
Perspectives on engagement & their measures 2

Sociocultural perspective

The student experience in a broader social context
Ontological approach centred on being
Deeper than previous affective dimensions
Measures - ?? (offers the ‘why’ for engagement/alienation)

Holistic perspective

The construction of being a student (including perceptions, expectations, experiences)

BUT: Overall, there is a lack of differentiation between engagement, its antecedents, and flow-on effects

Kahu 2013
Levels of engagement

- Deep vs shallow, high vs low

- **Macro**
  - Institute or course level

- **Meso**
  - Classroom level

- **Micro**
  - Task level

(Wiseman, Kennedy, Lodge 2016)
Why is student engagement important?

- Meta-construct aiming to contribute to explanations of student success (Kahu 2013)
- Neoliberal ideology emphasising performativity and accountability (Zepke 2014)

What the student does is most important for learning... (Biggs 1999)

- “Learning takes place through the active behaviour of the student; it is what he does that he learns, not what the teacher does” (Tyler 1950, p41)
- “What the student does is actually more important in determining what is learned than what the teacher does.” (Shuell 1986, p429)
So ... buzzword or fuzzword?

“the use of the student engagement concept is ambiguous”

(Vuori 2014)
Research Questions

Theoretical perspectives are multitudinous... but what is happening in practice?

As reported in the current empirical research literature:

■ What are academics’ conceptualisations of student engagement in higher education?
■ What tools do academics use to assess/measure student engagement in higher education?
Systematic review methods

- Databases: Web of Science, Scopus, Academic Search Complete, Medline, PsycINFO, ERIC
- Search terms: ("student engagement" or "learner engagement") AND ("higher education" or universit* or college* or post secondary or postsecondary) AND (measur* or evidenc* or evaluat* or assess* or concept* or experiment*) AND (classroom or online or blend* or distanc* or “face to face” or “virtual”)  
- Exclusion: pre-2000, K-12, not empirical, not relevant to research questions, institutional level measures, macro level, not English, not available in full-text, not peer-reviewed 
- Search conducted 2/12/2016
Flowchart

4192 references imported for screening ➔ 1 duplicate removed

4191 studies screened ➔ 3112 studies irrelevant

1079 studies assessed for full-text eligibility ➔ 819 studies excluded

- 504 Not measuring engagement
- 108 Not peer reviewed
- 84 Conceptual/not original research
- 47 Cannot access full-text
- 26 Not Higher Ed/K-12, community setting
- 25 Macro rather than classroom level
- 12 Duplicate
- 12 Engagement not primary aim of study
- 1 Not relevant to research question on measurement of Engagement

0 studies ongoing
0 studies awaiting classification
Preliminary papers by year (prior to final extraction)

Total = 260 papers
Results

27 studies in 2016 met inclusion criteria

Countries: Canada, China, Germany, Hong Kong, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Vietnam, UK, USA

16 disciplines represented
Purpose of studies

- Developing tools for measuring engagement
  - Scales/surveys
    - Factor analysis
    - SEM
      - Observational
- Engagement as a variable within a model (related to learning)
  - Antecedents
  - Influences on engagement

- Teaching and learning interventions having an impact on engagement
  - Academic development
  - Clickers
  - Face to face discussions
  - Flipped classroom
  - Gamification
  - Service Learning
  - Social media
  - Specific software/program
Conceptualisations of engagement

- Unclear - 10
- Behavioural, cognitive, and emotional - 5
- Behavioural (including participation) - 4
- Behavioural and cognitive - 2
- Behavioural, psychological, emotional
- Cognitive
- Flow
- Holistic
- Psychological
- Time and effort
Measures of engagement

- Questionnaires
  - Skinner et al 2008 (emotional and behavioural)
  - College Student Engagement Questionnaire - Handelsman et al 2005
  - Student Engagement Scale – Mazer 2012
  - Motivation and Engagement Scale – Martin 2007
  - Utrecht Work Engagement Scale – Schaufeli et al 2006
  - NSSE adaptations

- Number of goals

- Observations
  - Ethnographic
  - Video
  - Photography

- Data sources
  - Clickstreams
  - ARS
  - Likes, posts

- Teacher responses
What does this tell us?

- Many conceptualisations, many measures
- Consistency between conceptualisation and measure was poor – 11/27 were congruent
- 15 studies measured a behavioural aspect
- A range of studies talking about “student engagement” didn’t fit within our review criteria
  - They didn’t actually measure student engagement!!
  - Related ideas – boredom, satisfaction
Future directions

- Continue the review

- Explore conceptualisations and measures of engagement in school & work literature
- Are the antonyms (e.g. disengagement, boredom) more important?
- How does student engagement fit with Students as Partners?
Conclusions & Recommendations

- We have found more questions than answers!

- Student engagement can mean a variety of things, so be clear when you are using it as a term

- If implementing L&T innovations, go beyond behavioural conceptualisations & measures as indicators of success

- Clear reporting on both conceptualisations and measures is required to advance our understanding
References


Engage with us!

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