



# 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.

# 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

# 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

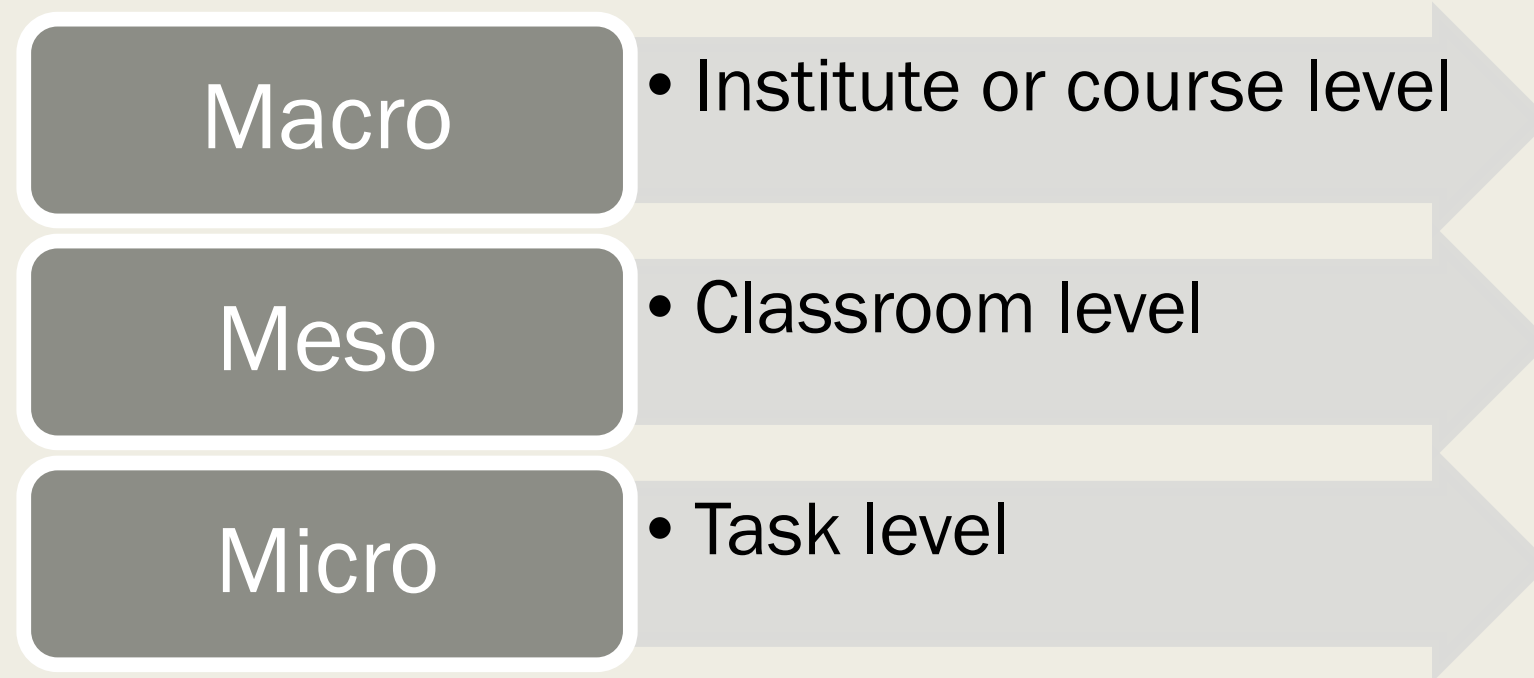
The construction of being a student (including perceptions, expectations, experiences)

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



# Levels of engagement

- Deep vs shallow, high vs low



(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)

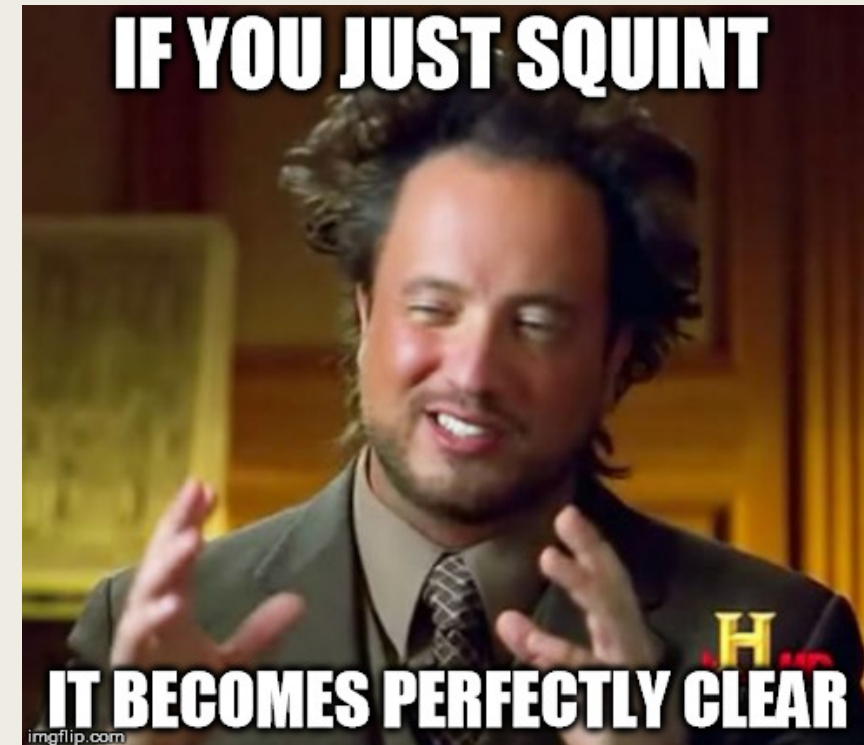
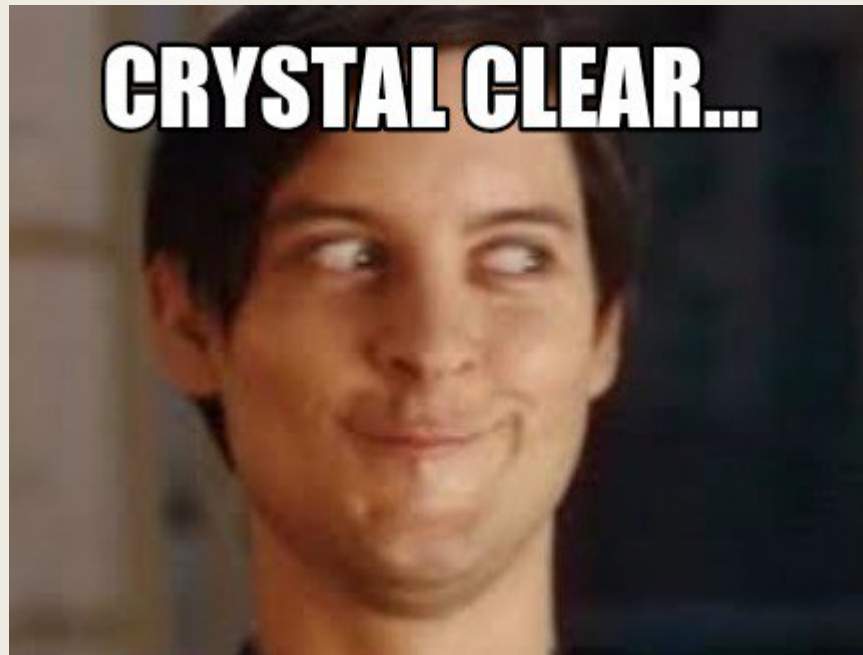
What the student does is most important for learning... (Biggs 1999)

- “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?

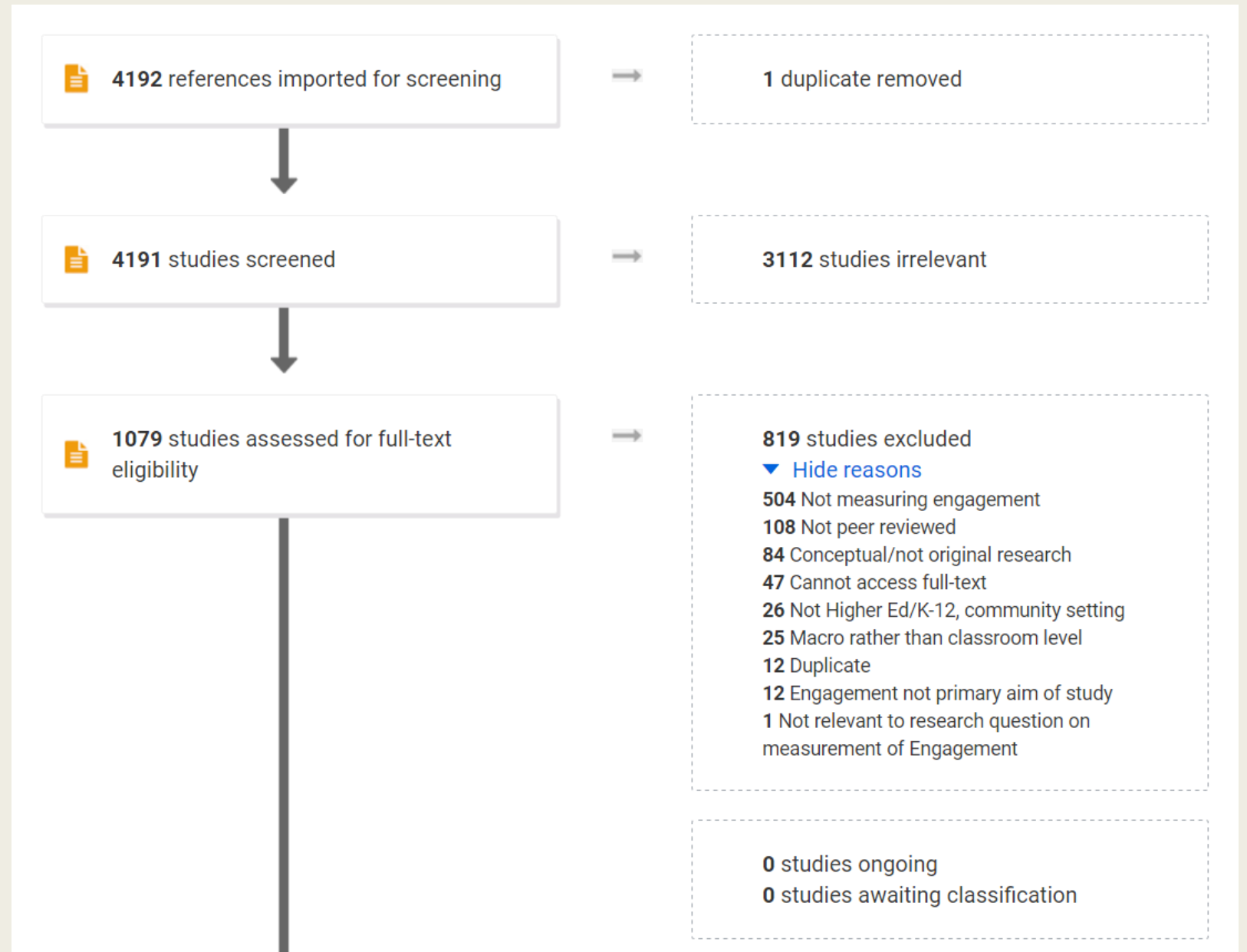
As reported in the current empirical research literature:

- What are academics' conceptualisations of student engagement in higher education?
- What tools do academics use to assess/measure student engagement in higher education?

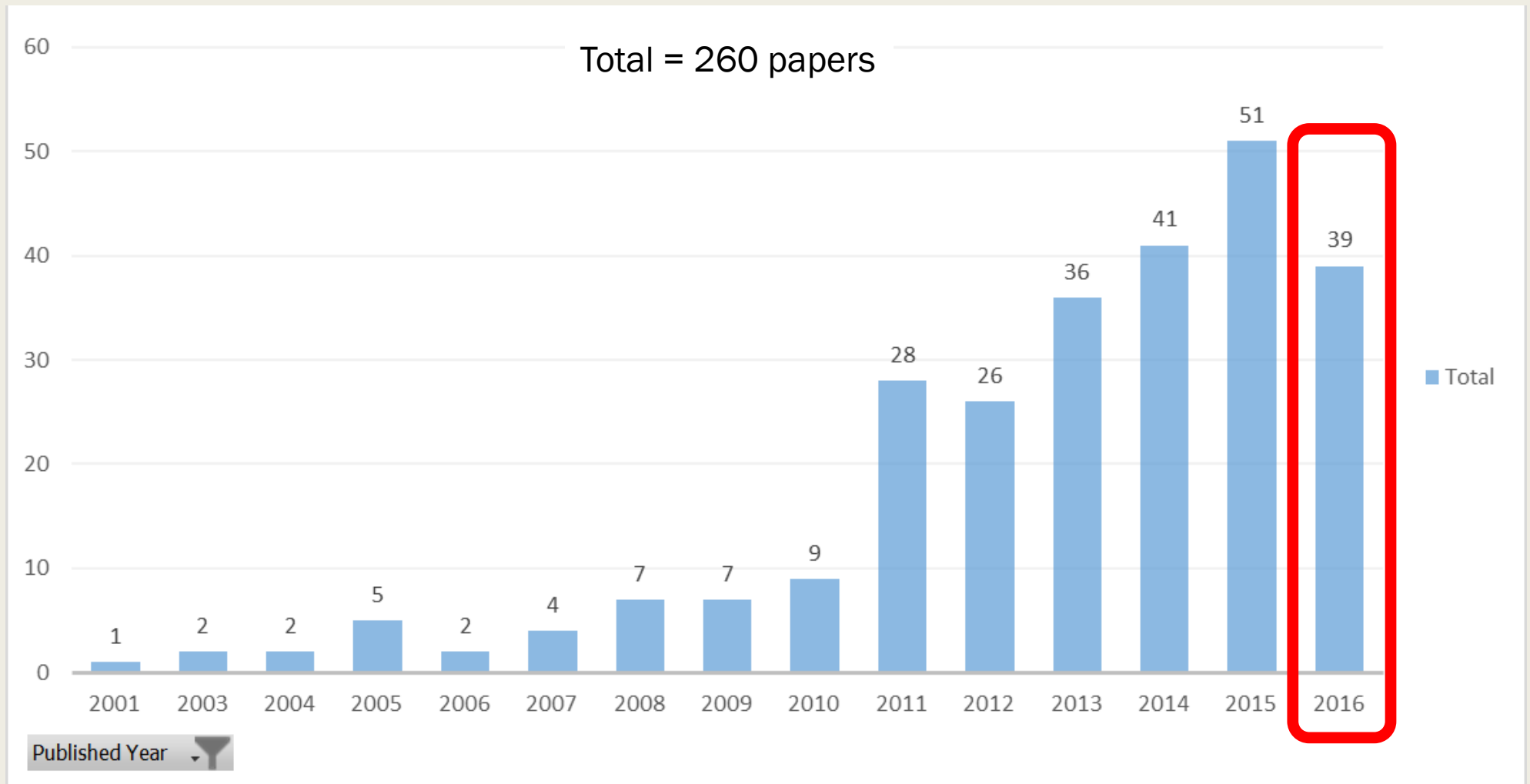
# Systematic review methods

- 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



# Preliminary papers by year (prior to final extraction)

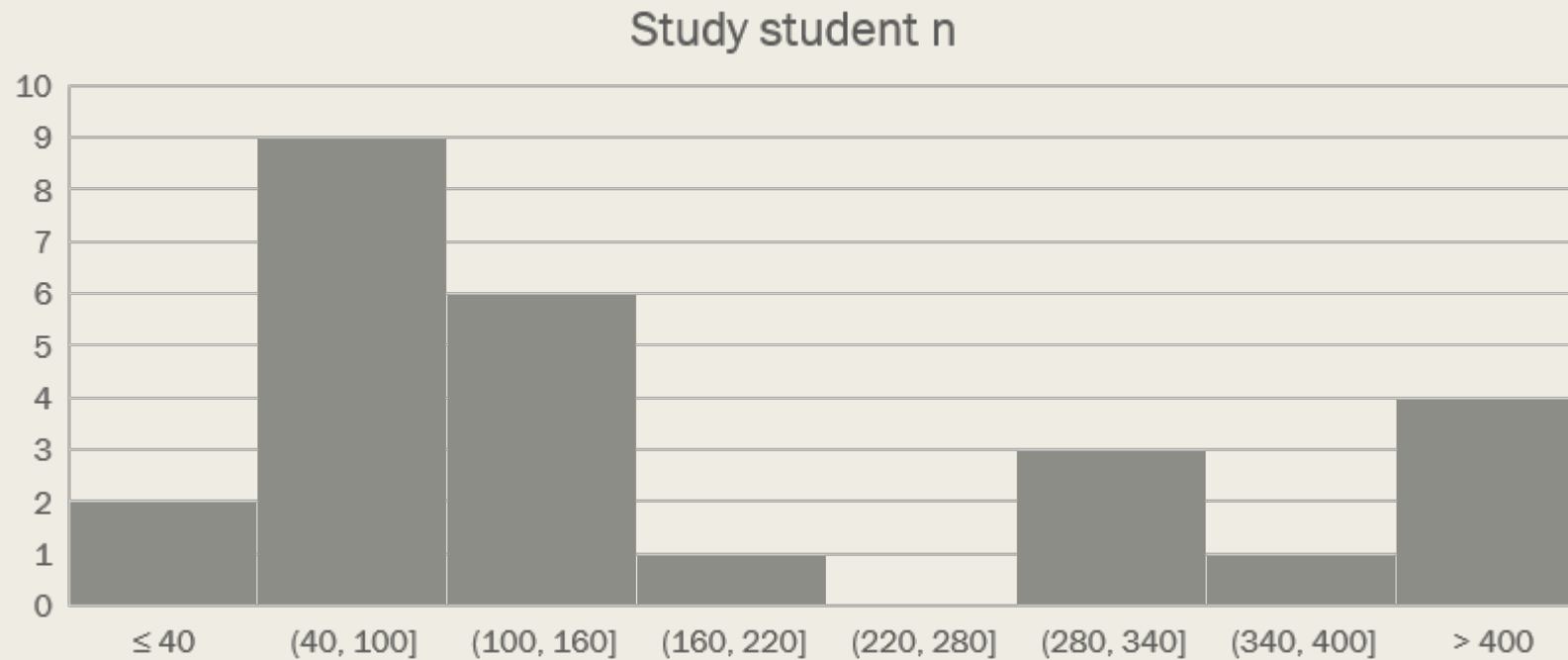


# Results

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

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# Engage with us!

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