

## **Editorial: Fostering student engagement**

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Engagement, linked with high-quality learning outcomes, plays a crucial role in student learning and experience of higher education. The concept of 'student engagement' is based on the belief that learning improves when students are fully involved in their learning (Deslauriers, 2019). Establishing constructive and collaborative relationships with students is a critical element of learning development practice but became hugely challenging during the pandemic, especially the first lockdown. Although students' presence in a classroom never guaranteed their engagement and participation, this engagement was significantly affected during the sudden shift to the virtual classroom. There were also several barriers to gauging student engagement, with turned-off cameras being noted by educators as one of the most prominent. This section showcases several practitioners' innovations to enhance and measure student engagement during remote learning and teaching in higher education.

The authors explain specific challenges they faced in HyFlex classrooms, particular issues with international student engagement, student anxiety over entering the 'cyber abyss' of online learning, and delivery of courses that required greater attention and self-regulatory behaviour. Conducting and facilitating small group laboratory sessions whilst considering any limitations due to Covid-19 safety measures needed careful planning. The challenges the educators confronted included introducing students to a more active and engaged method of learning while having to accommodate limited access to technology and reliable internet connections.

Various responses to these challenges to enhance student engagement are introduced in this section. The authors show how playful learning and reflective thinking empowered students to construct knowledge and apply it to classroom discussions; attendance data, chat box comments, and feedback questionnaires were used to measure engagement. Building relationships with students outside the classroom, establishing relationships of

trust and integrating subject knowledge and learning development were utilised to enhance student participation; the shift to hybrid and online interactions was exploited to influence programme priorities, with student engagement in mind; the nature of personal tutor meetings was changed to offer greater support and enhance students' academic and personal development.

This section offers a set of recommendations for enhancing engagement with staff and students in the hybrid context, student-to-student communication in group work, and tightening approaches to responding to absence. It demonstrates how learning developers helped ensure that individual students' communications with staff, other students, and the institution were effective during the pandemic. The stories of challenges, responses and recommendations in this section showcase the learning developer role to help bridge the gap between subject teaching and LD provision. The collaboration between educators has been highlighted as a critical element in most initiatives to enhance student engagement.

### **References:**

Deslauriers, L., McCarty, L.S., Miller, K., Callaghan, K. and Kestin, G. (2019) 'Measuring actual learning versus feeling of learning in response to being actively engaged in the classroom', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116(39), pp.19251-19257. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1821936116> (Accessed: 4 September 2021).