

EDITORIAL

Student Engagement: Contexts and Practices

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Recommended citation:

Wu S. M. (2017). Student engagement: Contexts and practices. *Asian Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 7(2), 1-4.

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Student learning underlines or should underline the crux of many teaching and learning conversations and effort. An engaged class with no student's attention meandering into virtual space is something that educators work towards. Student engagement is a key element in higher education classrooms and it has been investigated, analysed, and theorised in various contexts. There is evidence of the fundamental role student engagement has in learning effectiveness and student achievement. Trowler and Trowler's (2010) review goes so far as to suggest that the value in engaging student in the learning process is not being questioned anymore. Though its significance is undisputed as a fundamental factor for learning, the multiplicity of what it means to engage students in actual classroom practices, the strategies to facilitate such engagement, and the evidencing of its impact are still areas of continued discussion.

In this volume, the various articles connect in more or less direct ways in addressing issues relating to student engagement. We are privileged to feature a special *From the Desk of* reflection from Owen Hicks, Emeritus Professor and Senior Honorary Fellow at the University of Western Australia. Hicks kicks off this volume by sharing his perspective of teaching and learning. Hicks sets the tone at an appropriately complex level as he critiques the notion of global higher education. Far from being "global", Hicks observes that the higher education landscape is not a level playing field, as seen in his own teaching experience in engaging students in universities in Vietnam and China, institutional settings that privilege a Confucian heritage culture. Whatever alignment in culture between these institutional contexts there may be, Hicks describes the complex assortment of philosophies and religious influences that ultimately shape these institutions and influence their differentiated teaching and learning contexts. However, Hicks sees the possibility of brokering between seemingly distinct classroom cultures as exemplified by the Confucian approach and the Socratic approach in such a way that leverages on the strength of both and blending them into learning scenarios that engage the students effectively.

In the next article, Lee reviews the use a classroom approach that devotes the last part of a lecture for peer instruction or discussion. Such a discussion section may serve as a promising site for triggering student engagement by increasing interaction between student and faculty, and facilitating hands-on activities. However, after studying student perceptions gathered through a survey, it was found that student preference is for such sections to be a learning space for new materials rather than for practising materials learnt earlier in the lecture or for hands-on activities. Also, student perception data indicates that they did not seem to learn anything more in the interactive discussion mode as compared to the monologic lecture mode.

Zhang *et al.* traces the impact of a science communication module and its effectiveness in engaging students in a particular disciplinary setting using popular science materials. The contribution of this study lies in underscoring the role of epistemologies in the teaching and learning of communication within a multi-ethnic context. It points English language educators to the potential benefits of personalising the instructional design of a communication course that is contextually sensitive, as a way to optimise Year 1 science students' engagement with the module.

The book review featured in this volume provides a good distillation of student engagement issues in the new book entitled *Understanding and Developing Student Engagement* (2014, Colin Bryson (ed.), Routledge: New York). The review points us to some helpful chapters in the book that deal with the conceptualisation of the dimensions in student engagement and other research-oriented perspectives through a discussion of best teaching practices that engage students more effectively. Also, the fundamental importance of external factors in effecting student engagement is underscored in this book. However, the review also highlights the need for a more contextually nuanced and richer deliberation of student engagement issues that can contribute to a fuller picture of the concept, which currently emerges from primarily the North American, British, and Australasian contexts.

It is our hope that the articles in this volume will provide that trigger to summon more scholarly investigations within the university classroom on student engagement and its intricate role in bringing about effective learning, especially in the Asian contexts and beyond.

REFERENCE

Trowler, V., & Trowler, P. (2010). Student engagement evidence summary. York: Higher Education Academy. Retrieved from https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/evidencenet/Student_engagement_evidence_summary. ■

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