

Student Engagement: A Strategic Tool to Reform the Quality of Management Education

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Abstract—Management education institutions facing increasingly straitened economic conditions, attracting and retaining students, satisfying and developing them and ensuring they graduate to become successful & productive citizen. Student engagement is primarily and historically about increasing achievement, positive behaviors, and a sense of belonging in the classroom. Student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution. Kuh (2001, 2009) has defined student engagement as “the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities. Across India, as well as internationally, student engagement has become one of the key concerns and key strategies for educational and social reform particularly in management institutes. Management Educators interested in student engagement must more deeply analyze assumptions about pedagogy, about the purpose of management education, and about the so-called “digital students” and the world we are launching them into. The objective of this paper is to list the Student Engagement (SE) attributes and the subsequent effect on learning process. This paper also discusses the various dimensions of students’ engagement and elaborates areas like: various functions of SE. Through the Relationship Framework, which consists of seven levels of relationships, this paper attempts to formally strategize SE as an effective activity to reform the quality of management education.

Keywords—Learning Environment; Management Educator; Quality Outcomes; Relationship; Student Engagement.

Abbreviations—Student Engagement (SE).

I. INTRODUCTION

IN Management institute, teachers manage much of students’ learning. However, learning is enhanced if students can manage it themselves; moreover, once they leave institute, people have to manage most of their own learning. To do this, they need to be able to establish goals, to persevere, to monitor their learning progress, to adjust their learning strategies as necessary and to overcome difficulties in learning. Students who leave management institute with the autonomy to set their own learning goals and with a sense that they can reach those goals are better equipped to learn throughout their lives. We know our students have changed over the last twenty years; perhaps as a result of a technology rich upbringing, they appear to have “different” needs, goals, and learning preferences than students had in the past. We need to better understand these youth and determine how to best engage them in learning.

Student engagement is primarily and historically about increasing achievement, positive behaviors, and a sense of belonging in the classroom [Harris, 2008; Willms, 2011]. It is difficult to define student engagement. The literature and research reviewed stated that student engagement is hard to define. There are several types/categories of engagement – academic, cognitive, intellectual, institutional, emotional, behavioral, social, psychological, to name a few. However, the jury is out on whether a learner needs to be functioning in all areas of engagement for successful learning to take place. For example, do management students need to feel they “belong” to achieve high grades and graduate? Do students need to be academically successful to feel positive about attending class; or, is the social element enough, as long as they are behaving and passing?

Across India, as well as internationally, student engagement has become one of the key concerns and key strategies for educational and social reform particularly in

management institutes. Management bodies, academic administrators, and teachers seemingly embrace student engagement as the next step to improve the quality of management education. There is a sense of hope throughout the literature that educators and teachers can bring about positive change and increase student engagement in learning.

However, as logical as this consideration might seem, the majority of the literature calls for changing education, most authors practically implore change – or transformation – of education and pedagogy. Today’s world absolutely requires collaborative critical thinkers, creative and courageous innovators, and true lifelong learners.

It is interesting to note that the underlying purposes or goals of increasing student engagement have also changed as our understanding of human development and learning sciences has advanced. Of course, in the meantime, our world has changed drastically as well. Student engagement also became useful for gaining compliance or control of an increasingly restless and diverse student population. As an everyday classroom management strategy, teachers could use various teaching strategies to engage students in their work – such as group work, PowerPoint or multimedia presentations of topics, and project-based learning. In review of literature

on student engagement, this shift in focus and purpose for student engagement became evident.

II. FOUNDATION FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

It is easy to observe the lack of student engagement in management institution when students are drooped in their chairs and not listening to the teacher or participating in the discussion. Many teachers who constantly see disengaged students put the burden on the student and lament that they could be better teachers and have better results if they had the opportunity to work with a “better” group of students. But classrooms with high levels of student engagement are not simply a result of “student quality.” It is true that, depending on students’ prior experiences, attitudes, and perceptions, students can make it easier or more difficult to create a highly engaged classroom. But teachers are not limited to poor learning results because students are not engaged. Engagement refers to the extent of a student’s active involvement in a learning activity, a definition borrowed from Wellborn’s (1991). Engagement is a multidimensional construct. As depicted in figure 1, engagement features four distinct, but highly inter-correlated, aspects.

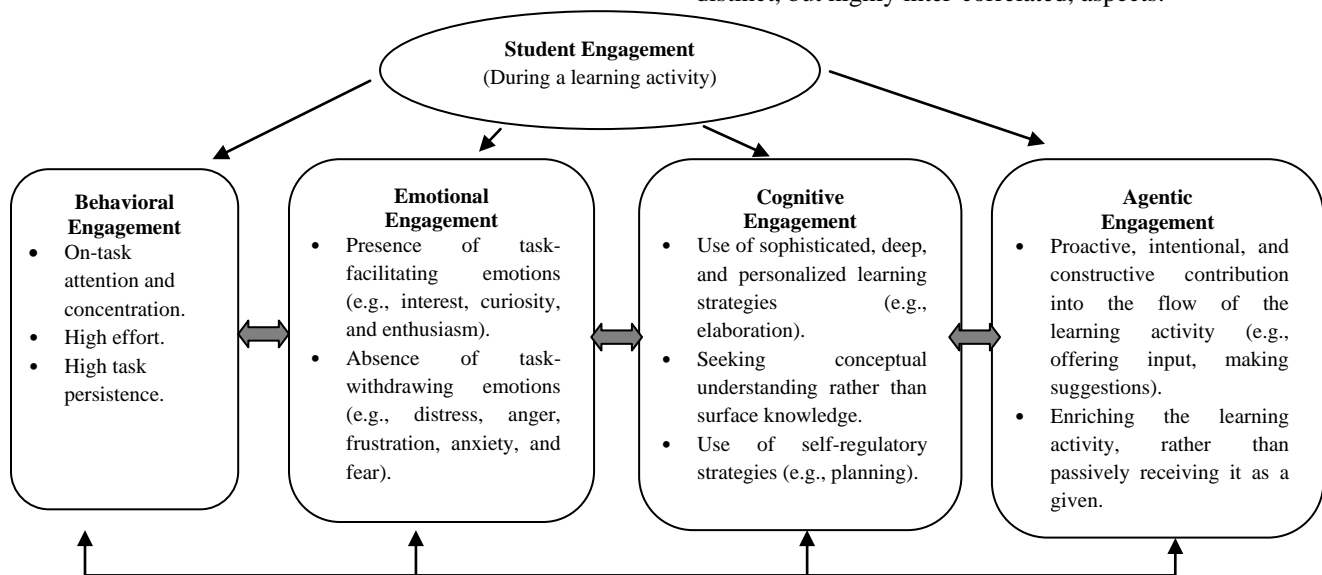


Figure 1: SE Features

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Harris’ (2008) extensive review of student engagement explains the challenge: “While there is general agreement that student engagement produces positive outcomes, defining the concept is problematic as there is disagreement about what counts as student engagement”.

Many academics now view engagement as a multidimensional construct, although many studies investigate only one dimension. Fredericks et al., (2004) classify 44 engagement studies into behavioural, emotional, and cognitive categories.

Dunleavy (2008) defines three combined types of student engagement most commonly reported in her research: Behavioral, Academic-Cognitive & Social-Psychological. “Academic Engagement” was changed to “Institutional Engagement” in 2010 [Dunleavy et al., 2010].

Meyer & Turner (2006) explored the concept of engagement and also added emotional engagement to the equation when they suggest “engaging students in learning requires positive emotional experiences, which contribute to a classroom climate that forms the foundation for teacher-student relationships and interactions necessary for motivation to learn”. Fredericks et al., (2004) identified

emotional engagement as a category and describe it in much the same way as Meyer and Turner.

“Students reporting an intense form of engagement are highly involved with their university study ... They tend to see teaching staff as approachable, and to see their learning environment as responsive, supportive and challenging” [Coates, 2007].

Lizzio & Wilson (2009) identified four clusters of motivations given by students for undertaking student representative roles, predicated along two intersecting axes: motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic) and focus (personal or systems).

Engagement allows students to develop in important ways, as noted by Bensimon (2009): ... productive engagement is an important means by which students develop feelings about their peers, professors, and institutions that give them a sense of connectedness, affiliation, and belonging, while simultaneously offering rich opportunities for learning and development.

IV. KEY DIMENSIONS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN MANAGEMENT SCHOOL

- a. **Cultivate one-on-one relationships.** The one-on-one relationship between student and teacher is the critical element that can lead to increased student motivation and higher levels of engagement in academics and institute life.
- b. **Learn new skills and habits.** Teachers can learn new skills and habits that help them to develop, polish, and enhance their already natural inclination to motivate and engage students.
- c. **Incorporate systematic strategies.** Teachers can learn systematic strategies that facilitate student engagement. Students can develop behavioral skills and habits that lead to increased academic achievement and greater involvement with institute life.
- d. **Take responsibility for student engagement practices.** It is primarily the teacher’s responsibility to engage the students, as opposed to the teacher expecting students to come to class naturally and automatically engaged.
- e. **Promote an institute wide culture of engagement.** The best way to promote high levels of student engagement is to develop and maintain a institute wide initiative that is dedicated to creating a culture of student engagement, involving students in institute activities, and providing a rigorous and relevant education program for all students.
- f. **Professional development** is an important part of increasing student engagement. Staff development, combined with staff ownership and recognition, is critical to developing and maintaining a culture of effective student engagement.

Each of these dimensions can have both a ‘positive’ and a ‘negative’ pole, each of which represents a form of

engagement separated by a gap of non-engagement. Thus, one can engage either positively or negatively along the behavioural, emotional or cognitive dimensions. This is illustrated in the table below:

Dimensions	Positive Engagement	Non-Engagement	Negative Engagement
Behavioural	Attends lectures, participates with enthusiasm	Skips lectures without Excuse	Boycotts, pickets or disrupts lectures
Emotional	Interest	Boredom	Rejection
Cognitive	Meets or exceeds assignment requirements	Assignments late, rushed or absent	Redefines parameters for assignments

V. FUNCTIONS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Student engagement is important, and this is so for many reasons. Student engagement is important because it makes learning possible, as it is difficult to imagine learning a foreign language or mastering economics without considerable engagement. Student engagement is important because it predicts how well students do in institute, including the academic progress they make or fail to make. Student engagement is also important because it is a relatively malleable student characteristic than is unusually open to constructive influences, such as a teacher’s support.

Student engagement is further important because it affords teachers the moment-to-moment feedback they need during instruction to assess how well their efforts to motivate students are working, as there is no better telltale signal about student’s private motivation than their public engagement. Three new and important functions of engagement emerge, as illustrated graphically in figure 2.

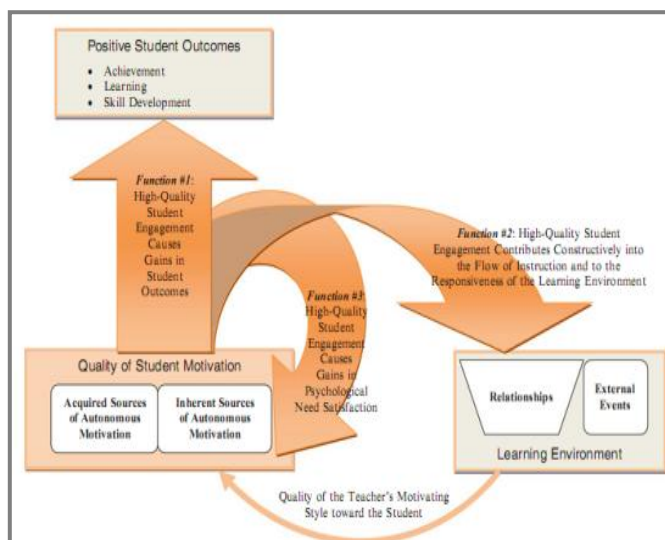


Figure 2: Functions of Engagement [Source: A Self-determination Theory Perspective on Student Engagement, J. Reeve, Springer Science+ Business Media, LLC 2012]

VI. THE STRATEGY: SE THROUGH RELATIONSHIP FRAMEWORK

Strong positive relationships are critical to the education process. Students are more likely to make a personal commitment to engage in rigorous learning when they know teachers, parents, and other students care about how well they do. They are willing to continue making the investment when they are encouraged, supported, and assisted. Perhaps what is needed is a classification to help management educators identify and quantify relationships that improve learning. This can be achieved through a tool, called the Relationship Framework, which consists of seven levels of relationships.

Relationship Framework	
Learning Relationships — Support for Students	
Level 0 Isolated	Students feel significant isolation from teachers, peers, or even parents. Students lack any emotional or social connection to peers and teachers.
Level 1 Known	Students are known by others and are frequently called by name. Teachers know students and their families, interests, aspirations, and challenges. Students are known by peers with whom they interact in the institute.
Level 2 Receptive	Students have contact with peers, parents, and teachers in multiple settings. Teachers exhibit positive behaviors of “being there” that show genuine interest and concern.
Level 3 Reactive	Teachers, parents, and peers provide help to students when requested, but support may be sporadic and inconsistent among support groups.
Level 4 Proactive	Others take an active interest in a student’s success. Teachers take initiative to show interest and provide support. Students and others express verbal commitment for ongoing support and validate this commitment with their actions.
Level 5 Sustained	There is extensive, ongoing, pervasive, and balanced support from teachers, parents, and peers that is consistent and sustained over time.
Level 6 Mutually Beneficial	Positive relationships are everywhere and commonplace in the way that students, teachers, and parents interact and support the student as learner.

The Relationship Framework first helps teachers understand that there are degrees of relationships. When they think about their relationships with students, teachers can use the framework to apply a qualitative measure to the relationships they make. This qualitative measure helps teachers reflect on their current levels and allows them to decide if they wish to make changes to improve relationships.

VII. CONCLUSION

There are frequent requests in the literature for educational reform, educational transformation, paradigm shifts, and cultural shifts in our management education systems. There is also near consensus that the standards and models we used in the past no longer work. A discussion is needed to bring us all up to date on what’s needed and how education can support those goals.

As Gilbert (2007) says, we have all the ideas, tools, strategies, and even resources we need to create the world class, innovative classrooms our students require; however, those ideas and innovations have been “imported into education systems that are build on the Industrial Age mental models”.

One core debate is academic achievement versus learning discourse. Our measures, our goals, and our language are geared toward higher achievement and completion, and not toward learning and human development.

Educators interested in student engagement must more deeply analyze assumptions about pedagogy, about the purpose of management education, and about the so-called “digital students” and the world we are launching them into.

Finally, student engagement produce changes in student motivation require extensive future study. It is an exciting fact that students can take self-initiated action—in terms of their behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and agentic engagements—to meet their psychological needs. If we do not expand our research and thinking about student engagement, we fall victim to traditional views about management education process; and, until we modify or eradicate this limited view of how management student learn, most of our work in the area of student engagement will fall short.

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