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Engagement in Higher Education: Panacea or problem-child?

UNSW Learning and Teaching Forum:
Engaging the Learner, Recognising the Teacher
11 September 2009

Kerri-Lee Krause

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Overview

- Engagement in higher education: state of play
- The one-size-fits-all trap
- What about staff engagement?
- Wrapping it up

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Engagement: state of play

- Student engagement - NSSE/AUSSE
- Bradley et al. (2008, p.79)
The panel has concluded that a comprehensive set of measures of the quality of teaching and learning should be developed. These should include measures of the student experience and form part of a broader accountability framework that is focused on the achievement of outcomes.

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Recommendation 7

- That the Australian Government require all accredited higher education providers to administer the Graduate Destination Survey, Course Experience Questionnaire and the [Australasian Survey of Student Engagement](#) from 2009 and report annually on the findings.

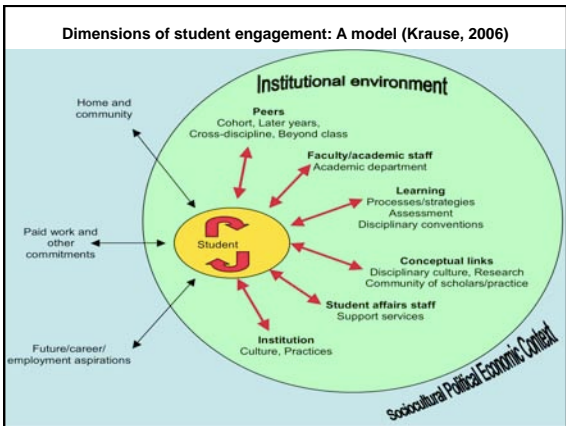
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Student engagement: what is it?

Student involvement in a range of educationally purposeful activities

AUSSE Scale	Description (source: AUSSE report 2009, ACER)
Academic challenge	Extent to which expectations and assessments challenge students to learn
Active learning	Students' efforts to actively construct their knowledge
Student and staff interactions	Level and nature of students' contact with teaching staff
Enriching educational experiences	Participation in broadening educational activities
Supportive learning environment	Feelings of legitimation within the university community
Work-integrated learning	Integration of employment-focussed work experiences into study

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Engagement: state of play

- **Student lifecycle approach to engagement**
 - **Transitions as opportunities for engagement**
 - Engagement point 1: First year (Krause & Coates)
 - Engagement point 2: Second year (Harrison)
 - Engagement point 3: Senior year (Gardner)

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Dimensions of engagement in first year: engagement moments

- Transition engagement
- Academic engagement
- Peer engagement
- Student-staff engagement
- Intellectual engagement
- Online engagement
- Beyond-class engagement

Source: Krause & Coates (2008) *Students' engagement in first year university*, Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 33(5), 493-505

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Relationships among engagement scales

	<i>Transition engagement scale</i> TES	Academic AES	Peer PES	Student-staff SES	Intellectual IES	Online OES
AES	0.33					
PES	0.36	0.25				
SES	0.53	0.40	0.32			
IES	0.51	0.53	0.20	0.48		
OES	0.16	0.19	0.27	0.13	0.13	
BES	0.50	0.16	0.48	0.29	0.24	0.11

Source: Krause & Coates (2008) *Students' engagement in first year university*, Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 33(5), 493-505

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Transition - an engagement moment

*What would have helped you in making the transition?
(to students from low SES backgrounds)*

- Uni-start assisted me tremendously
- Academic advisors with the RIGHT info
- Being more aware of university terms and the process of enrolling
- Better bus routes

First impressions of uni?

- You were kind of shoved into it, you were just meant to understand this whole new approach straight away and in a couple of weeks we were meant to be handing in assignments, but you don't know anything and you don't know what it's meant to be... (rural student at metro uni)

Source: Krause et al. (forthcoming) A Fair Go Beyond the School Gate? Old government funded study of Old uni students from LSES backgrounds (awaiting release)

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Intellectual engagement moments

There are so many opportunities, so many ways you can make connections to get yourself ahead in the world.

I think in first year, because there's not an immediate goal, like VCE... it's not pivotal or crucial...

First impressions of uni?

Lack of challenge within my course

I just like being at uni. Like sometimes I sit in the classes and I think 'cool, I'm at uni!'

Source: Krause et al. (forthcoming) A Fair Go Beyond the School Gate? Old government funded study of Old uni students from LSES backgrounds (awaiting release)

Engagement point 2: Second-year slump

- “The Forgotten Transition”: Out of first year into second year
- Glenn Harrison
(2008 ETL Conference, Brisbane.
See: www.etl2008.qut.edu.au/abstracts/ETL2008_eBook-of-Abstracts.pdf)

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Student self reporting of **second year slump** includes:

<i>Burnout</i>	<i>Nothing new</i>
<i>Feel invisible</i>	<i>Think you know it all</i>
<i>A lot tougher</i>	<i>GPA drops</i>
<i>Excitement over</i>	<i>Used to the routine</i>
<i>A dead zone</i>	<i>Caught between directions</i>
<i>Begin to slack off</i>	

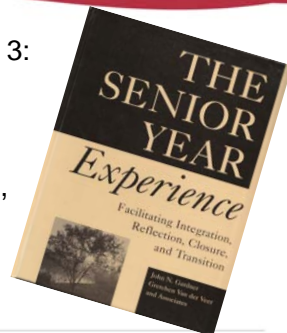
Source: Harrison, 2008

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Engagement point 3: The Senior Year

Gardner, Van der
Veer & Associates,
1998



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Extending our view of engagement

- Engagement . . . as positive connection
- Engagement . . . as appointment
- Engagement . . . as battle, conflict

Source: Krause et al., 2005. *Ten Year Trend Study of the First Year Experience in Australian Universities*

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Extending our view of engagement

Engagement in battle:

- at the expense of identity
- conflict of values, cultures, ways of knowing and doing
 - students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds
 - Indigenous students
 - students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds

See Krause (2005). *Engaged, inert or otherwise occupied? Deconstructing the 21st century undergraduate student.*

Available online:

<http://www.griffith.edu.au/qihe/staff/kerri-lee-krause>

Ann Jardine, Director Student Equity and Disabilities Unit

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What about staff engagement?

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ARC Discovery Project

- **Title:** The influence of disciplinary cultures on approaches to undergraduate teaching and learning
- **Aim:** to establish an empirical basis for understanding how academic disciplinary cultures affect the nature and quality of teaching and learning in higher education

Acknowledgements: This project was funded by the ARC Discovery Project Scheme. Project chief investigators are Professor Richard James (CSHE, University of Melbourne) and Professor Kerri-Lee Krause (GIHE, Griffith University).

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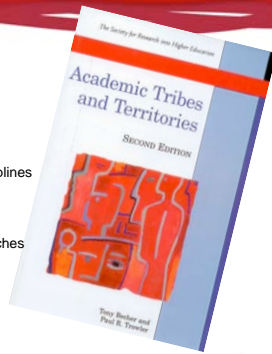
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ARC study

Questions:

- Do academics in different disciplines have distinctive approaches to teaching and learning?
- If so, do these differing approaches influence the ways that they organise their curricula and work with students?



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Developments in the thinking

Trowler (2006)

- challenges 'epistemological essentialism'
- argues that 'academic staff bring their worlds to the lecture theatre' just as students bring theirs
- challenges the matrix categorisation

The problem with this kind of categorisation is that while it seems to make sense when disciplines are viewed through the wrong end of a telescope, from a great distance, the distinctions fall apart in the analytical hand when one looks at disciplines close up. The fractures within them become very apparent when the analyst steps out of the helicopter... (p.4)

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Is there a disciplinary teaching community?

*Do you see yourself as **part of a teaching community** within your discipline?*

History

- We'll give a lecture in other people's units quite regularly. We're very very close.
- There's a great reluctance to discuss teaching generally
- ...that's a bit of a problem; the department tends to fractionalise ... there are fewer and fewer points on which we agree
- There are historians who try and set boundaries, and stop other people trespassing within the boundaries...

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Is there a disciplinary teaching community?

*Do you see yourself as **part of a teaching community** within your discipline?*

Maths

- There's a lot of levels in which I actually discuss; there's the informal level where we'd meet in the tearoom and we'd chat about it
- I do have a friend and sometimes we talk but we're from two completely different disciplines
- ...ummm, only with sort of ... how should I put it ... close colleagues.
- You just basically follow the notes and prepare your own set from there.
- Absolutely not

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Staff engagement:

Tribes and territories

or nomads?

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Thank you

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