

**Title:** Strategies to engage students in meaningful learning experiences

**Presenter:** Will Zoppellini, Dominic Cunliffe, Jon Cooper  
Solent University

### Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Review definitions of what engagement means within student learning.
- Critically analyse a variety of strategies to promote opportunities for engagement.
- Dissect the importance that enjoyment plays within student learning

### Session Outline

The term 'engagement' has become a catchphrase within the HE learning environment, used by teaching practitioners to describe how they hope students will behave in their contact sessions. The term represents the energy, time and enthusiasm that teachers hope students are able to give in their learning activities. It is also the term teachers hoped to be described as by the students themselves, but what does this transpire to in reality? There has been previous research on what makes for great teaching (Coe, Aloisi, Higgins and Elliot-Major 2014), and what student expectations are for resources (Hattie 2012).

With the new generation of students changing expectations of University and wanting more stimulus further research is needed to ascertain what students believe motivates them to learn and have enjoyable learning experiences.

The workshop is designed around research that was collected in two stages. Stage one included the video recording of classroom sessions and students completion of the critical incident questionnaire (CIQ) on a weekly basis for 7 weeks. This was based on previous work by Brookfield (1995) who used the questionnaire to allow students to suggest different ways that they're thinking critically, and the pace to introduce certain topics. The CIQ identified which activities or parts of the lesson were deemed engaging, confusing or disengaging and short qualitative answers on why. The video was analysed using sports code to pinpoint moments of engagement, disengagement and confusion from students based on the CIQ responses. Stage two of data collection involved focus groups with the students using clips of video to further comment on as well as questions based on video analysis and CIQ results.

Findings were that activities such as group work, formative presentations and class debate all ranked high with student engagement. However, the manner that these activities were delivered greatly impacted on how they were received, from sufficient resources or the actual content of discussion, to how many students were put into sub-groups for discussion. The project aims to critically analyse what the collective definition is of engagement between students and teaching staff, to help understand the pedagogical approach needed. As well as understand the role enjoyment plays in classroom sessions. This includes students' actively using their voice to analyse their own learning preferences.

## **Session Activities and Approximate Timings**

The session goal is to outline what the perceived characteristics are of an engaging lesson and how this can be produced in teaching. Therefore, small group discussions and tasks will be present throughout the session with the following timings and topics.

### *Initial group task (15 minutes)*

The focus here is to understand the variety of characteristics people associate with engaging lessons and how these differ. This opening task will involve small groups of participants giving their definition of student engagement in a classroom. This will be facilitated through a post-it note/flip chart exercise, that will involve the variety of definitions being presented by each group. These definitions will then be critically discussed with the group as a whole with any inconsistencies, contradictions and similarities highlighted and further discussed. This will conclude with a short vote from the participants on the top strategies to use in classroom sessions to achieve the desired engagement.

### *Discussion on types of strategies used in classroom (15 minutes)*

The focus here is to explore what strategies can be used in lessons to achieve the desired level of engagement defined in the initial task. This will start with a short presentation (PowerPoint with handouts made available) on the results from our research project on student perceptions of strategies and activities that engaged them in lessons (Including possibly playing some short clips from the study approximately 2 minutes in length). This will be followed by an open discussion involving the whole room (smaller discussion groups if participant numbers are high) that will compare the student results on preferred activities/strategies to those identified earlier by the group. This will be synthesised to wider academic literature on engagement in classroom sessions. It will be highlighted that the student voice can impact lesson planning, transitioning to the next part of this session.

### *Importance of student voice in designing lessons (20 minutes)*

The focus here is to analyse the importance of the student voice in lesson planning and how information is conveyed to students. This will involve small group table discussions to identify firstly how we can use small scale student feedback to help design lessons. Secondly to identify ways in which this can be achieved, laying a foundation of strategies for participants to take away with them. This table discussion exercise will last for 10 minutes and will be followed by a short presentation from the presenters on how student feedback was taken and utilised in this research project, giving ideas for best practice and explaining the importance of this process.

### *How can the workshop information transfer to your HE institutions (20 minutes)*

The focus here is for the workshop participants to form some ideas about how this can be applied to their pedagogical approach or their wider institution. To start this section an outline of the type of students used in this research project will be highlighted, for example this research was performed in a post '92 institution with students studying Physical Education. This will then give participants the opportunity to discuss in small groups, preferably pairs, how these strategies of engagement and student feedback can be used in their practice. This will involve sharing ideas on how different subject areas and types of students can be approached using adapted versions of the workshops themes. This final part allows for participants to have clear views on how they will apply what has been presented and discussed.

A final open question and answer segment will be held that will also allow for comments on the participants to critique the research project being presented (10 minutes).

## Preparation before session

Participants are asked to consider how they would define student classroom engagement. As well as the characteristics of an engaging lesson.

## References

- BROOKFIELD, S., 1995. *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- COE, R., *et al.*, 2014. *What makes great teaching? Review of the underpinning research*. Sutton Trust Available from: <https://www.openaire.eu/search/publication?articleId=od328::34193756fdc40d9929132d7caa022156>
- HATTIE, J., 2012. *Visible learning for teachers*. 1. publ. ed. London: Routledge