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“I DO BETTER, FEEL LESS STRESS AND AM HAPPIER” – A HUMANIST AND AFFECTIVE PERSPECTIVE ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN AN ONLINE CLASS

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ABSTRACT

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| Aim/Purpose | Fostering student engagement is one of the great challenges of teaching, especially in online learning environments. An educators' assumptions and beliefs about what student engagement is and how it manifests will shape the strategies they design to engage students in learning. However, there is no agreement on the definition of concept of student engagement and it remains a vague construct. |
| Background | Adopting the principles of user-centered design, the author maintains that to design learning experiences which better support student engagement it is important to gain insights into how students perceive and operationalize the concept of engagement in learning. The recent challenges of teaching effectively online prompted the author to reflect more deeply on the concept of engagement and how it might be achieved |
| Methodology | In the tradition of reflective teaching, the author undertook an informal, qualitative inquiry in her classroom, administering a brief questionnaire to students in her online class. When the themes which emerged were integrated with other literature and findings from the author's earlier classroom inquiry, some insights were gained into how students 'operationalize' the concept of engagement, and weight was added to the authors' premise of the value of humanistic approaches to university teaching, the need for greater emphasis on student-teacher connection and the necessity of considering the affective domain alongside the cognitive domain in learning in higher education. The insights were brought together and visualized in a conceptual model of student engagement. |

The full paper was previously published as the following and is being presented at this conference:

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Student Engagement Affective Perspective

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| Contribution | The conceptual model presented in the present paper reflects the author's present 'mental model' of student engagement in classes online and, when the opportunity arrives, in face-to-face classes as well. This mental model shapes the authors' course design, learning activities and the delivery of the course. Although the elements of the model are not 'new', the model synthesizes several related concepts necessary to a humanist approach to understanding student engagement. It is hoped that the model and discussion presented will be stimulus for further rich discussion around the nature of student engagement. |
| Findings | Interestingly, the affective rather than the cognitive domain framed students' perspectives on what engagement 'looks like to them' and on what teachers should do to engage them. |
| Recommendations for Practitioners | By sharing the process through which the author arrived at this understanding of student engagement, the author has also sought to highlight three key points: the importance of including the 'student perspectives and expectations' against which educators can examine their own assumptions as part of the process reflective teaching practices; the usefulness of integrating theoretical and philosophical frameworks in our understandings of student engagement and how it might be nurtured, and finally the necessity of affording greater influence to humanism and the affective domain in higher education. The findings emphasize the necessity of considering the affective dimension of engagement as an essential condition for cognitive engagement and as inextricable from the cognitive dimension of engagement. |
| Recommendations for Researchers | The emphasis in research engagement learning and teaching is on how we (the educators) can do this better, how we can better engage students. While the student perspective is often formulated from data obtained through surveys and focus groups, researchers in learning engagement are working with their own understandings (albeit supported by empirical research). It is crucial for deeper insight to also understand the students' conceptualization of the phenomena being researched. Bringing the principles of design thinking to bear on educational research will likely provide greater depth of insight. |
| Impact on Society | Empirical, formal, and structured research is undeniably essential to advancing human endeavor in any field, including learning and teaching. It is however important to recognize informal research in the form of classroom inquiry as part of teachers' reflexive practice is also legitimate and useful to advancing understanding of complex phenomenon such as student engagement in learning through multiple perspectives and experiences. |
| Future Research | Further research on the nature of student engagement in different contexts and against different theoretical frameworks is warranted as is empirical investigation of the premise of the value of humanism and the affective domain in defining and measuring student engagement in higher education. |
| Keywords | online learning, student engagement, teaching IT, higher education, humanism, affective domain, student-teacher connection, classroom inquiry, reflexive teaching practice |

AUTHOR



Geraldine Torrison-Steele is an associate professor in the school of Information and Communication Technology at Griffith University, Australia. She is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (UK). Her interest in learning and teaching, learning theory, technology for learning, human computer interaction, and leadership distils from her ‘pre-academia’ experiences in secondary school mathematics and physics teaching, and the design, development, and project management of digital interactive media for learning in higher education. Cutting across her interests is a belief in design with “the human at the centre.”