

# Experiencing the educational interface: Understanding student engagement

Ella R. Kahu, Karen Nelson, & Catherine Picton

Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students), University of the Sunshine Coast

Student engagement is widely recognised as critical to student retention and success – simply put, students who are engaged with their studies are more likely to be successful. However, the mechanisms contributing to an individual student’s engagement have not yet been clearly articulated. We understand engagement to be an individual student’s psychosocial state: their behavioural, emotional, and cognitive connection to their learning. In 1984, Astin proposed that student involvement, as he called it, was the missing link in our understanding of how institutional factors influenced student success. Aligned with Astin’s rationale, Chickering and Gamson (1987) proposed and later explored seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. These early contributions have strongly influenced curricular and co-curricular practices which have positively impacted on student outcomes. These practices include: peer to peer participation, access and interactions with staff, timely feedback, a scaffolded curriculum, early identification of students at risk, assessment aligned with learning outcomes, clearly articulated expectations, and a supportive but challenging learning environment. However, while the impact of these good practice initiatives has been comprehensively demonstrated, the mechanisms that explain *how* these initiatives influence an individual student’s engagement and success have not yet been clearly identified.

In 2013, Kahu proposed a comprehensive framework that shed light on the influences on and consequences of student engagement. In 2017 Kahu and Nelson refined this framework to include the notion of the educational interface as a metaphor for the individual psychosocial space within which a student is engaged in their learning. This new framework incorporates four key constructs within the interface, dimensions of the student’s psychosocial experience. These constructs are self-efficacy, belonging, emotions, and well-being. These four constructs represent pathways by which curricular and co-curricular initiatives and other factors influence student engagement and success. For instance, a student with financial difficulties or a heavy lifeload will have reduced well-being, which will inhibit engagement with their studies. Or a student who forms good relationships with staff and peers will feel a sense of belonging which makes them more comfortable in class and thus more willing to participate. This revised framework is a leap forward in our understandings about the mechanisms that underpin student engagement and provides a firm foundation for practice. This poster presents and briefly explains the revised framework as well as illustrating the framework by presenting data from a current study following a group of 19 first year students at a regional Australian university for their first year.

## References

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