

## Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

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Engaging with the Remote University: What Teaching and Learning in Lockdown teaches us about Student Engagement in Higher Education

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**Research Domain:** Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA)

**Abstract:** The extreme situation of lockdown presents opportunities to examine phenomena as these are amplified by the intensity of the circumstances. Considering the effects of teaching & learning under lockdown on the different facets of student engagement (SE), the paucity of the behavioural, emotional & cognitive (Fredricks et al. 2004) SE model in the HE context becomes more apparent. With universities prevented by lockdown from providing the context and the physical structure, students needed to create that for themselves. HE students were called on to project the university's (or the discipline's, or the programme's) sociocultural values and norms onto their own environments, to marshal their own agency and deploy their own critical authority - far beyond the behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement required of compulsory education students. This paper examines potential pathways to these "higher order" facets of SE, from emergency remote teaching to a post-lockdown context.

**Paper:** Our purpose in this paper is to take forward critical engagement with the Student Engagement (SE) construct, through examining what extreme circumstances - namely the widespread lockdown during the Covid19 pandemic - reveal about how students are required to engage in order to be successful in HE. During the height of the pandemic, universities around the world became "remote" while they deployed emergency remote teaching (ERT) as physical campuses were shut down to minimise the spread of the virus.

While a number of models of SE in HE have been proposed (e.g. Payne 2019, Solomonides & Reid 2009, Bryson & Hardy 2011), many (e.g. Kahu 2013; Kahu & Nelson 2018) have at source the Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) model which depicts SE in compulsory education as a "metaconstruct" which has three dimensions, namely behavioural, cognitive and emotional. Our own understanding of SE in the HE context takes issue with this model in two primary respects. Firstly, it locates SE within the individual (see also Bryson & Hardy 2011, Kahu and Nelson 2018) whereas we

consider SE in HE to be a relational product of investments by both student and their institutional context (Trowler 2010).

Secondly, it fails to capture adequately the multidimensional and dynamic nature of SE in HE. Our empirical research (Trowler *et al.* in prep.; Trowler 2015) into SE in HE contexts observed additional facets to the engagement of, and by, students, in ways that differed from SE in a compulsory education context. These facets were identified as critical, political, and sociocultural, and are understood (in relation to the student’s institutional context) as follows:

- critical - this relates to the student’s orientation to authority (in different domains);
- political (in the sense of power rather than ideology) - this relates to the student’s agency;
- sociocultural - this relates to the student’s values.

Students can engage differentially across different facets (for example, be engaged congruently in one module, but oppositionally in another, and be disengaged in a third) as well as across and between tasks within modules, and their engagement can wax and wane over time across these different facets, responding dynamically to changing circumstances.

Considering the effects of teaching & learning under lockdown on the different facets of SE, the paucity of the Fredricks *et al.* (2004) model in the HE context becomes more apparent. With universities prevented by lockdown from providing the context and the physical structure, students needed to create that for themselves. Students were called on to project the university’s (or the discipline’s, or the programme’s) sociocultural values and norms onto their own environments, to marshal their own agency, and deploy their own critical authority. These forms of engagement demanded of HE students were materially different from the engagement required of compulsory education students.

We argue that these “higher order” facets of SE are facilitated by the “lower order” facets identified by Fredricks *et al.* (2004), and that they build on each other (political engagement may have been easier under ERT if enabled by sociocultural engagement, and critical engagement may be facilitated by the capacities to engage politically and socioculturally. These may, in turn, be aided by the capacities to engage cognitively, behaviourally and affectively in ways that are productive within, if not congruent with, contextual expectations). In Trowler *et al.* (in prep.) we consider the following strategies as “pathways to engagement”:

	Pathway	Strategy
Affective	Emotions	* Foster positive emotions

		* Regulate negative emotions (through reappraisal)
<b>Behavioural</b>	Motivation	* Establish task value * Promote mastery goals (rather than task goals / task avoidance)
<b>Cognitive</b>	Resilience	* Promote awareness of student's coping strategies * Foster healthy balance (problem solving / support seeking / escape)
<b>Sociocultural</b>	Belonging	* Foster peer relationships * Build staff-student rapport * Nurture congruent values
<b>Political</b>	Self-efficacy	* Build awareness of student's internal & external resources * Foster reappraisal * Encourage autonomy
<b>Critical</b>	Reflectivity	* Identify student's reflection strategies * Shift student's reflection into "action" quadrant

Table 1: Pathways to Engagement (from Trowler *et al.* in prep.)

It is important to remember that SE is reciprocal: it is not just about *students* engaging, it is also about *engaging* students. Students' exercise of sociocultural, political and critical engagement through belonging, agency and authority requires us reciprocally to recognise their status as members, agents and holders of their own authority in their studies.

As we look back on the lessons of lockdown, we should not lose sight of the importance of fostering these "higher order" facets of engagement.

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