

Chapter 61

Building Student Engagement Through Collaborative Practice in Business Management Education

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ABSTRACT

The current article contributes to student engagement literature in higher education in line with the paradigm shift taking place in college teaching in India. The aim of this article supports that the collaborative approach does lead to active student engagement. The findings reflect the success of this Mumbai college in ensuring that each student participates in an active learning experience. This had clearly produced a level of engagement that other forms of learning cannot. As this study shows, in the Indian context, the collaborative approach turns out to a great answer to the present theoretical method of teaching and learning.

INTRODUCTION

India has the largest student population in the world amounting to 315 million students (The Times of India, July 3, 2014). Though the education sector has been modernizing in recent times, rote learning or 'learning by repetition' along with the dreaded year-end exam continues to be popular (Bharucha, 2018) and the classroom structure remains archaic. A typical Indian classroom still has rows and rows of benches aligned in a single file facing the blackboard and student minds are viewed as empty vessels into which teachers pour their wisdom. However, in recent times 'student engagement' is gradually inching its way into the system. This has become the latest focus of attention among Indian academicians, featuring in meeting agendas and theming seminars in Indian universities.

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Understanding and enhancing student engagement is now considered vital all over the world in ensuring student success. From a behavioral perspective, the concept should be understood in terms of 'time on task', but recent perspectives into this concept slot in aspects of teaching, the wider student experience, organizational encouragement and facets of students' lives beyond the four walls of the classroom. Much of the engagement research focuses on the pedagogy employed by teachers and institutions (Zepke, 2013) but Solomonides et al. (2012) assert that engaging discipline knowledge is as important as an engaging environment. Others are not so explicit about the role of content (e.g., Trowler, 2010). Student engagement can be enhanced by approaches that are embedded into mainstream provision to ensure all students participate and benefit from them (Thomas, 2012). Students' feelings about their study and their experiences of higher education are at least as important as their experience of the cognitive dimensions of their courses (Oberski et al., 2015). Activities should encourage collaboration and engagement with fellow students and members of the staff (Murray & Klinger 2013). In a similar vein Layne and Lake (2014) have observed that institutions are compelled to innovate their practices and instructors must be innovative, collaborative and creative in response to students' growing demands. Chase and Okie (2000) adopted a peer and collaborative learning framework in a first course for Computer Science majors and the term end results showed an improvement from 56% receiving a conceded pass or below to 32% and the rate for female students changed from 53% to 15%. Waite et al. (2003) have shown how a conversational classroom environment between students and with the faculty led to a doubling of 'A' grades. Beck et al. (2005) while investigating the use of collaborative learning in introductory computing classes reported that the grades throughout the semester improved for the collaborative learning batch and reduced for the non- collaborative learning group. Brett and Nagra (2005) studied the use of collaborative methodologies such as group work and concluded that it leads to a positive effect on student learning. Research by Graciela (2006) indicated that in-class collaborative approaches like group discussions and planned groupwork activities resulted in a pass percentage of 70% of students who were exposed to the active learning experience as opposed to only 44% for those who were not exposed to the active learning approach. A study by Loes and Pascarella (2015) on first-year chemistry students showed that exposure to collaborative-learning activities was associated with gains in critical thinking at the end of the freshman year of college. However, Bower and Richards (2006) rightly caution that success lies in the implementation, and not in the specific approach.

Simultaneously, the advances in technology and changes in the organizational infrastructure put an increased emphasis on teamwork within the workforce (Munkvold and Line Kolås, 2015). So, workers would have to be trained to need to be able to think creatively, solve problems and take all decisions as a team. Therefore, cultivating and boosting critical-thinking skills becomes one of the most important objectives of education.

Despite this growing body of international research, very little investigation has been done in India on these aspects of student engagement and the scant studies are confined to the primary and secondary levels (Huddy, 2012). As yet, there is no empirical evidence on its effectiveness at the higher education level. The current study contributes to student engagement literature in higher education in line with the paradigm shift taking place in college teaching in India. It uses selected variables from the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement which is by far the most extensively used and highly validated measure of student engagement. The variables and subsequent items relevant to *Foundations of Human Skills* were selected including: student and staff interactions, active learning, supportive learning environment, higher order thinking, general learning outcomes, and general development outcomes and overall satisfaction. As Indian schools are now aiming to prepare students for a global marketplace there is greater support

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