Chapter

HOW HAS COVID-19 SHIFTED HOW WE SUPPORT, RECOGNISE AND MEASURE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT?

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the 2019-2020 academic year, the engagement, achievement and progression of a level 4 cohort at a post-92 university in the East of England were explored in collaboration with the student cohort; questioning measurements of engagement (Bassett-Dubsky,2020). Even before Covid-19, students recognised the performative function of such measures.

This chapter suggests that available indicators of student engagement have not been fit for purpose during lockdown and online learning and have exposed issues with existing measurements. Pre-lockdown, students in this study viewed both attendance and meeting submission deadlines as a matter for individual choice, such that neither factor may directly indicate engagement. During lockdown, students might engage in a recorded taught session at a time of their individual choosing in ways that support greater engagement but are measured as non-attendance - equated with non-engagement. During Covid, we have appreciated that absence or premature departure may be due to a range of issues, including digital exclusion (Yates, 2020), lack of space at home for work, and inconvenience of session time given lockdown-related responsibilities. If we can be flexible in our interpretation and support of engagement that is not signalled by attendance during Covid, we can continue to be so post-Covid. Similarly, rapid embrace of lecture capture and technology-enabled inclusive pedagogy have brought positives to lockdown learning we may wish to retain, although the role of learner analytics is considered more sceptically.

Pre-Covid, the factor seen by the study cohort as most indicative of student engagement was, ‘Determination to progress and achieve’. This chapter suggests that lockdown has altered how we might identify whether a student is determined to progress and achieve, and how we might better appreciate barriers to acting on that determination. This chapter recommends that HEI should retain the Inclusive flexibilities of lockdown learning (Wonkhe & Aula, 2021) that allow student personalisation and extend these flexibilities to our interpretation and recognition (Wong and Chiu, 2020) of subjective student engagements (Parkes *et al*, 2020).

Keywords: Student engagement, Inclusion, attendance, participation, relationship, performativity, learner analytics, lecture capture

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INTRODUCTION

Student engagement is a contentious construct that lacks consensus of definition (Venn *et al*, 2020), yet wields considerable power (Bunce *et al*, 2021; Zepke, 2018). Digital traces, or 'touch points' (de Freitas *et al*, 2015), are over-relied upon to make behaviourally-driven normative value judgements of students' engagement within systems that are not yet inclusive enough to support the diversity of widened participation. Performative pressures to evidence practice that supports participation increase reliance on background and behavioural data but act against enabling that participation by rendering individual complexities (and anything not objectively measurable) invisible.

Significant changes to practice and interactions during Covid-19 have shown that the legitimacy of many of our pre-Covid interpretations of behaviour cannot be attributed to meaningful engagement as was once claimed. During Covid, staff have been willing and able to embrace new and more flexible ways of working (Wonkhe and Aula, 2021), which can be seen to offer real opportunity for better inclusive practice post-Covid.

What is 'Engagement' and how is it assessed

Engagement is seen as the 'primary construct' when we look at student retention and progression (Korhonen *et al*, 2019). It cannot be reduced to a simplistic equation and must consider multiple, shifting, complex and diverse internal and external factors that shape what is possible, desirable and observable in subjective engagements (Zepke, 2018). The multiplicities of students' experience, however, are missed by the grand narratives so often driving engagement discourse and the 'big data' informing it (Gravett, Kinchin and Winstone, 2020). Korhonen (2012, p297) seeks to recognise a more holistic student experience and defines engagement as, "the level of integration of students in their studying environment."

One of the key indicators of engagement is Attendance (Benkwitz *et al*, 2019), which is seen as critical to student success (Moores, Birdi and Higson, 2019) and easily measurable (perhaps part of why it is so key). However, assumptions that success is evidenced by absence of failure

(Archer and Prinsloo, 2020, p890) risks reading attendance as the absence of ‘absent’, where attendance is not synonymous with ‘present’. Attendance facilitates evidencing of participation, which is seen across the literature as a particularly significant indicator of engagement. This is especially true of those with more community-based values who align greater participation with greater belonging (Korhonen *et al*, 2017) – a commonly agreed central dimension of engagement, alongside that of identity (Korhonen *et al*, 2019).

How we measure success and engagement is very much informed by who we envisage as our ideal learner (Broughan and Prinsloo, 2020). This identity is often constructed through a combination of traditional norms and what we can measure (Dyment, Stone and Milthorpe, 2020; Gravett, Kinchin and Winstone, 2020). If who we envisage as our ideal student is based on our own profile, given the lack of diversity in academia we risk reproducing discourses and expectations that are classed, gendered and raced (Wong and Chiu, 2020).

Discourse around engagement “embraces dominant ideas about knowledge, performativity, accountability and the very purposes of higher education” (Zepke, 2018, p439). Government discourse has constructed the ‘ideally engaged learner’ based on a transactional exchange such that students are “units of systemic growth” that must show return on investment (Kelly *et al*, 2017, p106). This functional and reductive construct is too singular and impersonal to engage with, or be inclusive of, the complexities of student diversity.

The concept of the ideal learner is relevant in that it seems consistent with student engagement discourse that situates the responsibility for engagement in and with the student, as if any fault or responsibility is theirs. Gourley (2017, p23) refers to views of ‘student engagement’ as relating to what is desirable “*in* students” so that HEI teaching might be seen as successful. If this is re-phrased as ‘interactions desired from and with a student by the university’, the responsibility seems like more of a joint endeavour and makes it clear who is measuring and assessing those interactions (ie the university).

Exploring the relative value of factors of engagement with a level 4 cohort

There is a lack of consensus about which dimensions of student engagement are of most value, who they are valued by, and how they are promoted (Kelly *et al*, 2017; Venn *et al*, 2020). Much of the discourse is driven from a behavioural perspective, which tallies with the quantitative nature of the majority of the research around measurement of 'engagement' (Moores, Birdi and Higson, 2019). However, defining student engagement from this perspective lacks clarity and is limited by the nature of the data on which it is based, such that it offers little understanding of the individual students whose engagement it judges (Kahu, 2013, p760). Such an approach seems to be driven by availability of data (Bond *et al*, 2020), such that we value what we measure – not because it is inherently valuable but because we can (Kelly *et al*, 2017; MacFarlane & Tomlinson, 2017; Dyment, Stone and Milthorpe, 2020)

Throughout the 2019-2020 academic year, the engagements, achievement and progression of a level 4 cohort at a post-92 university in the East of England were explored in collaboration with the student cohort; questioning measurements of engagement (Bassett-Dubsky, 2020)[2]. Focus groups based on a Diamond-9 ranking activity of factors that indicate engagement showed that what students agreed was most indicative of engagement was 'Determination to progress and achieve'. Of all the available factors, this was the hardest (most subjective) for the university to recognise; what *students* found most meaningful was least measurable. 'Determination…' could be seen as the antecedent to the engagement – "the intent and unobservable force that energises behaviour" (Bond *et al,* 2020, p3), which would lead to the following definition of engagement: 'Determination to progress and achieve leading to actions that constructively support that determination'.

When asked how tutors might recognise this determination, it was through deduction based on seeing they had engaged with; "Wider research" and were "communicating" and "coming to lessons with more knowledge" as well as having to "just overhear" and "gauge" it. These clues would be easy to miss and rely on tutors being in the right place at the right time, equitably, and interpreting what they were hearing and

[2] Further details from throughout the project may be found on the project blog (see references)

gauging equitably. "Coming to lessons" suggests attendance is a pre-requisite for these inference/performance opportunities. "Wider Research" might be indicated by digital traces of library loans and e-resource access, but there are so many opportunities for relevant wider research that would not be captured. It was interesting that none of the focus groups suggested the way to find out how determined a student might be to progress and achieve was to ask them. Fuller *et al* (2018) found that students were pretending to engage for 23% of session time, even where the tutor was rated highly. Their desire to be seen as engaging was partly to avoid offence to the tutor and partly to avoid getting into trouble (*Op Cit*, p19). This may suggest our visible reading of attendance as engagement leads to behaviours that are both performative and infantilising (MacFarlane and Tomlinson, 2017). It also reinforces the unreliability of interpretation of engagement on the basis of observation (Fuller *et al*, 2018).

We are increasingly operating in a culture of presenteeism, where attending and engaging are very different things (MacFarlane, 2012, p27). Attending but not being present (playing games or looking at social media on a phone, chatting off topic with friends, sat there quietly whilst being somewhere else in your mind) was seen by the study cohort as an empty presence and therefore meaningless in terms of indicating engagement. Presence and participation must be meaningful if engagement is to be meaningful (Korhonen, 2012). The study group did value attendance as an aid to learning and saw its benefit for interaction (and improved communication) that would support learning and achievement. There were clear echoes of 'the Index for Inclusion' (Booth and Ainscow, 2002) in these themes, in that Presence, Participation and Achievement were all closely linked and needed to all be active for meaningful engagement.

Looking at student engagements within a narrative of Inclusion helps re-frame engagement discourse to focus on barriers to engagement and how they might be removed (Korhonen, 2012, p297) more than on how to perform engagement. This also shifts more of the responsibility for student engagement towards the university. However, ironically, it is probably the pressures of evidencing meeting that responsibility that lead to an over-focus on behavioural measures of engagement, since

they deliver more certainty – at the cost of participating in technologies of control (Zepke, 2015).

The role of Learner/Learning analytics and digital traces

With an awareness of the unreliability of observation as the basis for interpretation of engagement in class and tasks (Fuller *et al*, 2018), learner/learning analytics (LA) may offer greater objectivity and scope in what they measure. LA pull contextual data and digital traces from different systems into one, where they may be presented through a visual dashboard. As part of a growing emphasis on the process of learning, LA are able to capture indicators of presence and participation, as well as more conventional measures of achievement (MacFarlane & Tomlinson, 2017, p12). This may bring opportunities to supportively intervene in relation to presence and participation, with a view to improving achievement. However, it risks pressurising students into complying with what their setting thinks learning should look like (Bunce *et al*, 2021; Broughan and Prinsloo, 2020) when we need to recognise that there is more than one way to be a good learner. Students need to be allowed to work in their own way to feel included in their studies (Tobbell *et al*, 2021).

We need to remember that LA should serve us, rather than us serving it (ie avoid tailoring what we do to what it can measure). For example, if we look to use LA for additional indicators of participation, this may lead us to create 'busy work' in order to evidence participation, but does not indicate engagement in anything of value (Dyment, Stone and Milthorpe, 2020). An example of such 'busy work' might be an online discussion board to which students are required to post a certain number of times and respond to a set number of posts from their peers. Where this happens without any tutor interaction or personalised feedback, it is not perceived as valuable by students, despite being conveniently measurable (*Op Cit*). 'Busy work' may even obstruct engagement by taking time away from more meaningful activities (*Op Cit*), as well as conveying to students that it is compliance with tutor-set activities that counts as 'engagement' and therefore that are of value – disempowering them as agentic learners (Kahu, 2013; Broughan and Prinsloo, 2020). There is a crucial difference between 'being engaged' and engaging with

(participating in) a particular task. The latter is current-context and content dependent whilst the former is broader, more holistic and ongoing. LA measure *what* is engaged with, but not why or the value of that activity.

This leads to the concern that LA may be too reductive and fail to acknowledge individual complexities (Parkes *et al*, 2020) such that the potential efficiencies may ignore messy (yet highly relevant) issues of context (Benkwitz *et al*, 2019) and lead to attribution error in conflating the ‘what’ with the ‘why’ when all that is measured are proxies for learning (Archer and Prinsloo, 2020).

Not only is attribution error an interpretive risk, there is also risk of information overload through a vast and increasing array of data, that needs to be filtered and transformed into insights by someone who is context-aware (Foster and Siddle, 2020; Herodotou *et al*, 2019; Agudo-Peregrina *et al*, 2014). One way overload may be avoided is through specifically targeted use; perhaps prioritising particular digital traces (although which traces may be significant in which ways, and to what extent, is still contentious and unproven). An alternative is not to distinguish between the potential value of particular traces and look at the bigger picture of any digital interaction trace vs total non-interaction (Foster and Siddle, 2020). No engagement alerts that pick up a set time period without any digital trace and go directly to the relevant tutor for them to initiate contact with the student are claimed to create a background-neutral framework for interaction (*Op cit*, p852). This background neutrality is presented as a positive that avoids stenotype and stigma. However, the potential stigma comes from the response to the background, not the recognition and acknowledgement of that background. We need to know students through personal contact, as contextualised individuals, to develop the trust and rapport necessary for our students to feel they belong (Bunce *et al,* 2021). Additionally, if it takes three weeks from the start of term to trigger such an alert (and the subsequent interaction) this seems like valuable time lost, especially if engagement behaviours in the first three weeks correlate positively with more frequent digital traces and higher attainment throughout the course of study (Summers, Higson and Moores, 2020) and when we know that students want us to react to non-interaction (Moores, Birdi and Higson, 2019).

When we consider the scope of digital traces, we should be aware how broad this scope is and how the type of data collected differs between HEIs. Differing availability and reliability of data may lead to claims on the basis of what we have rather than what might be most insightful. Students in the Diamond-9 study cohort were aware that their HEI's LA dashboard captured the following: Attendance (through card swipes by the student in the classroom or manual addition by the tutor), VLE log-ins, Module log-ins within the VLE, Library loans [3], E-resource access (number of), Academic skills tutorials. These were then collated and fed back through the visual dashboard as overall engagement; using a traffic light system to indicate degrees of engagement and offering a comparative option for students to compare their engagement with the cohort average.

There is much potential limitation in the utility of these data (Summers, Higson and Moores, 2020). Frequency of log in to VLE only seems to correlate with outcome for online courses, not with face to face courses (*Op Cit*). Library use data only captures the numbers of times of access or loan – not how long that source was engaged with or whether it was read at all. It also misses entirely students who do not borrow the text but sit in the library to use it (*Op Cit*); or students who buy the text; or students who download a journal article once (one 'engagement credit' for library use) but then go on to read it multiple times or share it with a friend – who then gets no 'engagement credit' at all for their invisible source engagement; or students who access relevant academic material online but outside of the university library system. Attendance shows an 'engagement credit' for students who swiped in to a Face to Face session, or logged in online… regardless of what followed that initial swipe or log in. The engagement of students who do not attend in person but watch a lecture recording and engage with the session materials is not externally credited (captured in the dashboard), although lecture capture data is included in many systems. Students who study together outside of class (with such interactive participation often seen as valuable for attainment and belonging (Korhonen *et al*, 2017)) may work with one laptop between them, with one user logging in to the VLE and

[3] During the 2019-20 academic year, the Library loan feedthrough was not available.

relevant module sites on behalf of the group – but only the engagement of the logged in user is visible in the digital trace. If students download the material they need from the VLE, they have reduced need for further logging on – and reduced opportunity therefore to evidence their engagement with those materials, because we are only looking for very particular signs of interaction as evidence of engagement.

During Covid-19

When we focus on measuring participation, we are aware that there are many reasons why a student may not participate consistently and reliably in discussions or learning activities. Teaching and learning during Covid-19 has increased the legitimacy (a value-judgement) of many of these reasons. Family, health and personal problems (Neves, 2019) have been widespread for the majority – not just for students. Anxiety, uncertainty, wellbeing, isolation and lack of motivation have been concerns across the HEI community (Dickinson, 2020; Wonkhe and Aula, 2021; Dodd *et al*, 2021). Childcare responsibilities have limited study time and which times are suitable for being online (Rainford, 2021), with 45% of respondents in some studies saying their home environment did not support online learning (Dodd *et al*, 2021).

HEI colleagues have seen both improvements and additional barriers to student engagement during Covid-19 (Wonkhe and Aula, 2021). Attendance in particular seems to have been a measure less fit for purpose, being both improved (in that students are present/logging in) but less meaningful (in that attendance is not leading to work completion or interaction) (*Op cit*).

Digital exclusion has created further barriers to engagement (Yates, 2020; Wonkhe and Aula, 2021) with the ONS impact study (2020, p5) finding that 16% of students did not feel equipped to engage with online learning. Dissatisfaction with online learning seemed driven, not by quality, but by difficulties accessing it and lack of Wifi (Dickinson, 2020), with over half of students having unreliable internet access that disrupted their learning (Dodd *et al*, 2021, p6). Inequity of access to technology is significant (Rainford, 2021) and we must ensure that other inequities of access are made equally visible.

During Covid-19, learning technologies were an essential enabler to support inclusivity and accessibility (Venn *et al*, 2020). The way learning resources were provided, courses were structured and assessed, and what guidance was given to students on how to spend their independent study time were all substantially changed (Wonkhe and Aula, 2021). HEI colleagues are both willing and able to adapt their approaches. Better inclusion for students with diverse backgrounds and life experiences has been explicitly recognised as a priority for post-pandemic practice (*op cit*) and our changed ways of working during Covid-19 have opened up opportunities for greater Inclusion.

In terms of how we measure and understand engagement, HEI colleagues' demand for better technology-driven insights (Wonkhe and Aula, 2021) suggest that what is currently captured is recognised as inadequate for the claims that are based upon it. Covid-19 practice has made default assumptions about how engagement is indicated by students' online behaviours and digital traces (Archer and Prinsloo, 2020) far less credible. This is largely because we all have first-hand experience of significant challenges and barriers throughout Covid. Therefore, it may be that interest convergence might lead to greater flexibility for students and staff (Bell, 1980; cited by Nishi, 2020, p2). Whilst this might effect change towards better Inclusion, motivation stemming from interest convergence is mostly temporary (Nishi, 2020) and we must ensure that what we have learnt during Covid-19 leads to enduring systemic change.

Transferability of practice and system gains during Covid to a post-Covid context

Gilardi and Guglielmetti (2011) flag the paradox of widening participation into a system that is insufficiently inclusive in its structure and practice. A diversity of students has not made Inclusion inevitable (Tobbell *et al*, 2021). We need to be more flexible in our HEI systems to support non-traditional students so that they might achieve, "balance between their academic and external commitments that enables them to reach a level of engagement sufficient to achieve academic success" (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011, p36).

Even pre-Covid, a majority of students reported struggling with feelings of anxiety (Barkas *et al*, 2020, p7) and we know that significant further decline in mental health has been a widespread impact of the pandemic (ONS, 2020; Dodd *et al*, 2021). If we can support autonomy in our students, through our systems, this may help counter increasingly high levels of student anxiety and support the many students who report being overwhelmed (Barkas *et al*, 2020; Tobbell *et al*, 2021). This would mean giving students much more choice in how and when they learn and are assessed (*Op Cit*) so that they work in ways and environments that are empowering for them (Pearson *et al*, 2019).

We need to be flexible about "where, when, how and with whom learning takes place" (Kelly *et al* 2017, p117). During Covid-19 we have seen that HEI communities can both do and value this flexible approach (Wonkhe and Aula, 2021). If we can agree that factors like attendance and meeting submission deadlines might be supportive of engagement, whilst not directly indicating engagement, might that change the way that we label and use such data? This might include retention of multiple submission windows that were part of some HEI emergency regulations during the first lockdown, allowing student choice of when to make first submission from numerous possible opportunities. If we are looking to be proactive and support people to be mentally healthy rather than being reactive (Korhonen, 2012) we need to give them more agency to manage their workload (including assignment submissions) proactively, rather than wait until they are in distress in order to become eligible for mitigation (Barkas *et al,* 2020). The multiple submission windows supported student agency whilst removing the need for formal mitigation bureaucracy (Kettell, 2018). The deficit model of student engagement suggests issues with meeting deadlines that are published at the start of the academic year are due to poor time management on the part of the student, and the advance notice of the deadlines should facilitate students to manage their time adequately. However, "students do not seem to find this practice enabling" (Tobbell *et al*, p291). There were system challenges in ensuring smooth progression and enrolment onto subsequent level modules (as well as managing less predictable marking loads). However, these are system issues (that hard-working colleagues overcame so that progression and enrolment were possible) and the system should serve the people. If we can overcome such vast systemic

challenges under such time pressures during a global pandemic, surely, we can retain the benefits of those changes and make their administration smoother post-Covid.

When we consider factors like attendance and meeting submission deadlines, we need to recognise also that they are related. In presenting both measures as indicative of engagement, and making the nature of both fixed and inflexible, we could be working at cross-purposes. The most cited reason for student non-attendance is other university commitments, where nearly half of all absences were due to students doing other work for their course (Oldfield *et al*, 2018, p515; Moores, Birdi and Higson, 2019, p379). These students were engaged with their studies, but they were not enabled by the system within which they were working to maximise or fully evidence that engagement. Inclusive flexibilities should allow students space to evidence the necessary learning outcomes and quality standards in the way that is best for them (Tobbell *et al*, 2021).

Similarly, our expectations of what engaged attendance looks like, and what might impact on the nature of attendance, have shifted. If "it does not matter *if* but rather *how* students attend class" (Buchele, 2021, p132) then to maximise meaningful attendance we should provide multiple ways for students to attend to their learning – online (live), face to face, online asynchronous, a combination of these options; a student-led choice on a session by session basis. Flexible practice enables participation (Tobbell *et al*, 2021) whereas a stubborn requirement for face to face attendance as a singular mode of engagement makes it difficult for many students to engage at all (Thomas, 2020, p297).

We know that more flexible practice in relation to forms of attendance would ease the particular pressures experienced by many 'non-traditional' students, including young carers (Kettell, 2018), students with mental health difficulties (Barkas *et al,* 2020; Tobbell *et al*, 2021), commuter students (Gravett, Kinchin and Winstone, 2020; Thomas, 2020), students from minoritized ethnicities (Bunce *et al*, 2021), students with dyslexia (Dommett *et al*, 2019), students with English as an additional language (Caglayan and Ustunluoglu, 2021). If we continue to employ more Inclusive approaches to effective pedagogy

(Tobbell *et al*, 2021) and what we interpret as presence and participation, we will benefit all students (Pearson *et al*, 2019).

We might measure the impact of presence and participation through achievement, but our measurement of achievement must then be individualised. Effort cannot be objectively assessed (if visible at all), yet it is an attribute of the 'ideal student' that outweighs any resultant achievement level (Wong and Chiu, 2020). If we interpret outcome for effort, we may unfairly judge and demotivate students who perceive their effort as unseen (Bunce *et al*, 2021). A grade of C might be well-received and good progress for one student yet B+ might be perceived as disastrous and off-track for another (Bunce *et al*, 2021). The focus on (and definition of) 'good grades' as 2:1 or higher seems damaging to students' sense of competence. Likewise, assessing 'graduate employability' as a higher attainment risks reinforcing the 'return on investment' transactional construct of 'engagement' (Kelly *et al*, 2017) and ignores how most of the key roles in many subject areas are not seen as graduate roles.

The role of Learner/Learning analytics post-Covid

Our use of LA also needs to evolve. Interpretation and use of LA must recognise diverse and individual experience and any use of LA must be learner centred (Archer and Prinsloo, 2020) and genuinely collaborative with students (Parkes *et al*, 2020, p113). We should define and understand categories and concepts relating to student engagement *with* students (Foster and Francis, 2020) and move away from interpretations based on deficit models (Broughan and Prinsloo, 2020). This can only be done through ongoing conversation with individual students.

Unless student agency (Broughan and Prinsloo, 2020, p619) drives our use of LA, raising students' awareness of LA might both disempower (Broughan and Prinsloo, 2020, p625) and increase performativity (Bassett-Dubsky, 2020) which could then lead students to disengage (Kahu, 2013, p763). It may even decrease students' mastery goal orientation (Lonn, Aguilar and Teasley, 2015), along with correlated cognitive engagement (Korhonen *et al*, 2019), whilst reinforcing a consumer model of Higher Education. It is vital that we focus our efforts on *how* we use LA at an individual level (Herodotou *et al*, 2019).

Multiple sources suggest that the most effective and inclusive way to meaningfully understand and support student engagement is through relationships - personalised student-tutor interactions (Tobbell *et al*, 2021; Agudo-Peregrina *et al*, 2014; Summers, Higson and Moores, 2020). Tutors who are already more engaged with their students seem to have students with better learning outcomes (Herodotou *et al*, 2019). Students want more interaction with their tutors, though many may be shy to initiate that interaction (Yale, 2019) or have adopted sub-optimal 'coping alone' strategies (Bunce *et al*, 2021). Where use of LA can instigate and better inform student-tutor interaction, such that tutors might ask better questions; this would help us better understand what is happening behind the 'touch-point' data (de Freitas *et al*, 2015). Arguably, LA is not necessary to build these relationships or ask these questions. If the argument for LA is that it helps us ask better questions more efficiently through targeting students at risk, because tutors in pastoral roles have only minimal time allocated to that role (Tobbell *et al*, 2021; Foster and Siddle, 2020)… then the issue is with the time allocated that causes LA to be used non-inclusively. Every student should be able to benefit from relationship-building and data-informed conversations with a tutor (Yale, 2019).

Lecture recordings post-Covid

Finally, increased availability of lecture recordings during Covid-19 has been well received and should continue. Lecture capture seems to empower student choice and flexibility with little impact on their attainment (Moores, Birdi and Higson, 2019). It facilitates autonomy in students' learning and the pace of learning and is valued by students such that it increases student satisfaction ratings (Dommett *et al*, 2019). Even just knowing that the recordings are there acts as a safety net that students value and find reassuring (*Op Cit*). Whether the format of the lecture recording was live-streamed or pre-recorded, the vast majority of students who report using the recordings found them very helpful to their learning (Witton, 2016). Lecture recordings are most effective when they are used in conjunction with live session attendance, when they can actually decrease the risk of student's dropping out (de Freitas *et al*, 2015) – re-engaging students who might otherwise be non-attaining and read as non-engaged. Frequent users of lecture recordings are more likely to have dyslexia or be non-native speakers of English

(Caglayan and Ustunluogu, 2021), who need that supportive opportunity to self-pace and re-play key parts of a session.

There are potential issues for students with lecture capture. We would want to avoid students being lulled into a false sense of security in thinking that use of recorded lectures alone is as effective for learning as attending a live session (Dommett *et al,* 2019). Much student use of lecture recordings involves watching only very short selections from the whole session, such that just accessing the recording does not equate to engaging with the session as a whole (Caglayan and Ustunluogu, 2021). As with any resource, we would have to make it accessible and clearly navigable, as well as discussing how it might best be utilised.

There are also potential issues with lecture capture for academics. Wonkhe and Aula (2021) flag concerns that embracing a more blended approach could be seen as a cost-cutting opportunity, where recorded lectures might be re-used without need for the creating academic. If we are to build improvement into our post-covid practice that embraces these inclusive opportunities, there needs to be much better trust between staff who teach and support and those in higher management (*Op cit*) such that we can trust we are not working ourselves out of employment. This is particularly true in a context where HEI finances are constrained and increased redundancies are visible (Fazackerley, 2021; Petrescu,2021). If we are doing live lectures we are needed; If use of lecture recordings is increased (and previous recordings re-used) then it is not only the lecture that no longer needs to be live (Basken, 2021).

CONCLUSION

We need to be able to recognise the benefits and opportunities of digitally enabled practice whilst also staying aware that digital exclusion remains an issue. Giving students agency to navigate a more flexible system with a variety of engagement options would allow them to make the best decisions for themselves, as necessary within their current and evolving contexts. We also need to recognise that greater flexibility is likely to free students from our digital overview and mean that we will only know much of what they might do to engage by asking them. These changes will allow for multiple ways of being a good learner that may, in turn, reduce performativity. Once the pressure of compliance with a

single model is removed, our best option for understanding and supporting student engagement will continue to be direct and personalised conversation with individual students. Space for these conversations needs to be facilitated in workload planning to support all students to be present, participate and achieve.

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