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Chapter 17:

Engaged with what, whom, when, how and why? Longitudinal and relational engagement in online postgraduate education in Scotland

Tim Fawns, Monash University, Australia
Orcid ID: 0000-0001-5014-2662

Abstract

We often talk about engagement without asking: engaged with what or whom, when, how and why. In this chapter, I reflect on a program of research into an online Masters in Clinical Education at the University of Edinburgh. Here, engagement spans across and beyond a student's formal curriculum, and can change from moment to moment without being a triumph or crisis of learning. An apparent lack of engagement should be disentangled from a lack of motivation. Online, postgraduate students' external commitments and conditions are particularly influential, which makes enduring, rather than continuous or expected, engagement, more important. Engagement, therefore, is something to cultivate longitudinally, through relational agency and community, rather than something to generate within each session. Recognising engagement as relational, and distributed across students, teachers, and institutions, can illuminate forms of groundwork that educators and institutions can do to support engagement beyond momentary attentiveness to lasting involvement.

Keywords relational engagement; online learning; postgraduate education; philosophy; longitudinal; long-term engagement

Introduction

We often talk about student engagement in education, but rarely ask: engaged with what, when, with whom, and why? The default focus is often on what a teacher is saying or doing at a particular moment in time, or a specific task that students have been given. But there are alternative places to focus, including engagement with domain knowledge (Ashwin et al., 2014), with peers, or even with administrative processes (Ashwin & McVitty, 2015). Further, engagement can be seen as short- or long-term (Fredricks et al., 2004), and may fluctuate over time (Muir et al., 2019). Should students only engage in expected ways, at designated times, with assigned tasks? We also rarely ask who else should be engaged, apart from students. After reviewing literature on engagement, I reflect on these questions in relation to an online Masters in Clinical Education at the University of Edinburgh.

The rhetoric of engagement

Student engagement has been studied and talked about in schools and universities for decades, resulting in thousands of research papers (Trowler, 2010), featuring prominently in institutional policy, strategy, and marketing (Trowler & Trowler, 2010; Zepke, 2014; Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017). Engagement is often assumed to be an unquestionable good

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(Trowler & Trowler, 2010), an important element of educational processes, and necessary to student achievement and retention (Krause & Coates, 2008).

It is politically difficult to argue against engagement, because, as seen in Part 1 of this book, it is an imprecise and pliable concept (Trowler, 2010). It is often flattened within policy and public discourse (Hayes, 2019) as its various facets (e.g. behavioural, cognitive, emotional) are lumped together (Ashwin & McVitty, 2015). Engagement also tends to be conceived of as an individual construct (Kahu & Nelson, 2018), with limited consideration of the contexts that shape its meaning (Ashwin and McVitty, 2015). Engagement is often tied to measurement and effectiveness (Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017), where it becomes something to be 'optimised' through 'best practice' (Hayes, 2019). Thinking of student engagement as a singular, measurable idea homogenises students (Hayes, 2019) and neglects the objects of engagement. We seldom ask: engaged with what; nor do we ask about how disengagement differs from the absence of engagement, or the extent to which forms and fluctuations should be a cause of concern (Ashwin et al., 2014; Chipchase et al., 2017). Further, we rarely ask what forms of social, symbolic, and embodied capital are required to engage with Higher Education in the first place (see Aitken et al., 2019; Stone et al., 2021).

In a research context, engagement is seen as multifaceted. Many have used categories of behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004). Behavioural engagement involves participation in academic and social activities within the institution (Hagel et al., 2012). It can include doing set tasks, following rules, or taking part in extra-curricular activities (Fredricks et al., 2004). Emotional engagement refers to ways in which students feel connected to educators, peers and the institution (Hagel et al., 2012). Cognitive engagement refers to intellectual effort in understanding concepts or solving problems, and is closely related to motivation and self-regulation (Fredricks et al., 2004). Ideally, a student would experience all these facets of engagement together, but they may be more engaged in one facet than another, potentially leading to 'less authentic' engagement (Saeed & Zyngier, 2012). Distinctions between these facets of engagement can be vague or ambiguous. For example, the doing of learning tasks may be attributed to behavioural engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004; Young, 2010), while cognitive engagement is 'the active process of learning' (Redmond et al., 2018, p. 191) or 'what students do and think to promote learning' (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 192). These closely interrelated aspects of engagement might be best understood in terms of the role each plays in a holistic, multifaceted concept with interdependent dimensions (Redmond et al., 2018).

Engagement and online learning

Some important aspects of engagement are more noticeable in online contexts. In particular, student-teacher relationships may be even more important in online programs because of the need for social presence of teachers and peers (Garrison et al., 2000). This is reflected in Redmond et al.'s (2018) expansion of behavioural engagement to include supporting and encouraging peers, upholding online learning norms (e.g. following rules of online etiquette), and developing agency. They also added 'collaborative engagement' (learning with peers,

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building student-teacher relations, making use of institutional opportunities, and developing professional networks), and 'social engagement' (community building, sense of belonging, relationships and trust).

Engagement is often emphasised in discussions of online learning (Martin & Bolliger, 2018), where online engagement is frequently assumed to be inferior to 'classroom' or 'face-to-face' engagement (e.g. Hu & Li, 2017). For example, during the Covid-19 'emergency remote teaching' (Hodges et al., 2020), many educators worried about what students were doing and thinking during Zoom classes. This led to a flurry of research and grey literature on online engagement, much of which ignored the established literature on online learning (Weller, 2022). A strongly-felt worry was the inability to clearly see and hear students, accompanied by demands for cameras and microphones to be on at all times (Boys, 2022). Such demands can be at odds with principles of inclusion because they require students to make themselves visible within their private study spaces, and ignore inequalities of access to infrastructure (e.g. in terms of broadband, hardware or conducive learning spaces) (Boys, 2022; Littlejohn et al., 2021). Engagement in online contexts has also been portrayed as vulnerable to technology challenges and failures. Certainly, technology is important, and students need time, space, and structure to navigate the technological configurations of their courses (Marley et al., 2021). However, engagement is also contingent on teaching methods (e.g. a Zoom seminar) and context (e.g. students' expectations, study and work conditions, infrastructure, resources, support networks, disciplinary considerations, etc.) (Fawns, 2022).

This discourse of online disengagement can imply that students are naturally engaged in on-campus education, and that educators can identify engagement through observation (Boys, 2022). However, students are often disengaged in on-campus education too. Further, it may only be possible to observe behavioural engagement and, even then, sometimes only in a performative or ritualistic sense (Saeed & Zyngier, 2012). The assumption that teachers can recognise engagement on the faces of students is rarely questioned, even when designing computer-based, automatic facial expression recognition techniques to measure engagement (e.g. Bosch 2016). At the same time, there are many forms of online engagement, some of which are not visible to educators (Dyment et al., 2020; Gourlay, 2015). For example, lurking (observing online interactions without actively participating) can be a form of engagement or 'legitimate peripheral participation' in an online learning community (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Dennen, 2008; Honeychurch et al., 2018; Kuhn et al., 2021).

Investment, commitment and involvement

Engagement involves more than looking attentive or visibly participating. Contemporary conceptions of student engagement are heavily influenced by Astin's (1984) work on student *involvement* (Trowler, 2010). Astin was interested in the '*investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects*' (1984, p. 298, emphasis mine), including content, resources or ways of learning. Trowler (2010) positions student engagement as an *investment*, by students and institutions, of time, effort and resources. Fredricks et al. (2004) use 'investment' interchangeably with 'commitment'. However, I suggest that investment and

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commitment connote subtly different parameters of involvement. For example, Redmond et al. (2018) highlight the emotional commitment to learning, managing expectations and 'recognising motivations', whereas they describe the intellectual investment of cognitive engagement. Commitment, then, may be primarily emotional or attitudinal, whereas investment may suggest the allocation of cognitive or material resources to a learning endeavour. Commitment might be demonstrated through investment (e.g. the establishment of student support hubs demonstrates commitment to supporting student engagement through investment in staff and infrastructure).

Where commitment or investment suggests a desire or readiness to engage, involvement suggests actually being engaged; a mutual shaping of engaged elements (Trowler, 2010). This conception can help us to see that the emotional valence of engagement need not be positive. The nature of learning is such that students often face frustration, failure, and discomfort, which are also forms of engagement. A student might even be said to be highly engaged in a complaints process about their course. Engagement as involvement is multidirectional, contingent on the interplay between multiple elements (student and teacher, student and resource, multiple students, etc.).

Complex and relational views of engagement

Understanding engagement as the property or attribute of an individual student underplays the entanglements of people (Bovill, 2021; Gourlay, 2015; Matthews, Lodge & Johnstone, Ch. 3, this book), their different contexts, purposes, values, methods and technologies (Fawns, 2022), and material spaces and places (Gravett et al., 2021). Some scholars have examined engagement as contingent on, or even co-constituted with, the student's environment (Billett, 2008; Gourlay, 2015; Gravett, 2023). From such views, an absence of engagement is impossible because students are inevitably bound to other elements (materials, technologies, infrastructure, systems, resources, workplaces, learning and working conditions) in an educational relationship.

Rather than asking whether a student (or teacher) is engaged or not, we can cultivate richer understandings of educational activity, and consider the kinds of agency different actors have to engage in meaningful ways (Gourlay, 2015). Curricula and learning outcomes are often fixed before students arrive, and engagement is then viewed in terms of the extent to which student align with these pre-given parameters (Ashwin & McVitty, 2015). However, not everyone has equal opportunity to engage in the same way—there are power dynamics and diverse conditions, and different fits of different students with the systems and structures of educational programs and institutions (Gravett, 2023). There may also be obstacles to staff engaging with students' circumstances and forms of inequity, particularly amidst growing student numbers, casualisation of the educational workforce, fatigue from Covid-19 pandemic, the increased emphasis on flexibility and care, imperatives to address challenges and opportunities of generative artificial intelligence, and so forth (Gravett et al., 2021).

Engagement in an online Masters in Clinical Education

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The Masters in Clinical Education is an online program at the University of Edinburgh in the United Kingdom. Since starting in 2008, it has grown into one of the University's largest online postgraduate programs, with excellent satisfaction scores in the UK Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (which convey only a very limited conception of engagement). The program is concerned with developing theoretical and practical knowledge, critical appraisal, issues of social justice and ethics (Fawns et al. 2022). Students mostly study part-time while working as clinicians and clinical educators, often with significant professional responsibilities. The program is comprised of three years of study, each of which leads to a PG Certificate / Diploma / MSc, respectively. At the time of writing, more than 300 students who were, themselves, educators of clinical practitioners across a range of disciplines, learned about concepts, theories and practices. It was a very international program, with students based across Europe, Africa, Asia, North America and Oceania (not yet South America), and with diverse cultural backgrounds, professional settings, material infrastructures and life circumstances. It was run by staff with a diversity of disciplinary backgrounds (e.g. dietetics, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, learning technology), who have the program as their primary focus.

A significant program of research provides insights into different forms of engagement within this Masters, including empirical and conceptual studies relating to postgraduate online learning (Fawns, 2019; Fawns et al., 2019; Fawns et al., 2021b); evaluation (Fawns et al., 2021a; Marley et al., 2021) curriculum design (Fawns et al., 2023), learning processes and outcomes (Aitken et al., 2019; Aitken et al., 2022); and leadership (Aitken & O'Carroll, 2020; Fawns, Gallagher, & Bayne, 2021).

Educational approach

Students were invited to weekly online conversations in Microsoft Teams, recorded for those unable to attend. Cameras, microphones, and using text chat were all optional, and there was a mix of modes and forms of participation by different students. Discussion boards (Blackboard Learn) supported asynchronous conversations. We promoted these communication channels as dialogic spaces, where a combination of student and teacher perspectives and agendas generated topics for discussion (albeit, within a broad, pre-designed curriculum). No particular thread of conversation was positioned as essential. They were like streams that students and staff dipped into when it suited them, rather trying to swallow the whole body of water (e.g. by reading every post on the discussion forums). We tried to avoid dictating how students should engage, and held open different possibilities. The only mandatory activity was the summative assessments.

In our postgraduate context, teachers and students may have been less concerned with marks than in other contexts, and more concerned with expanding horizons, and developing professional curiosity, knowledge and practice (Aitken et al., 2019). This opened up possibilities for dissolving divisions, between roles and forms of work, that were not necessary to the good functioning of the program. Our aspiration was to position teachers as

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interested guides rather than sources of answers. This, we thought, would be aided by embracing teacher vulnerability and imperfection, and being candid about our own fallibility and uncertainty (Molloy & Bearman, 2019). We encouraged students to see themselves as our colleagues, with rich and diverse experiences of different settings, from which staff and student peers could learn (Fawns et al., 2023). This sense of collegiality also extended to students helping to facilitate teaching sessions and resolve technical issues.

As with any educational endeavour, our aspirations and principles were not always realised for every student or in every moment. In particular, our approach became more challenging as the number of students grew. At times, there were floods of forum posts and emails, and not enough time in the weekly conversations for everyone to speak. Indeed, even in the days of smaller numbers, the team, and the students themselves, would have been overwhelmed if all students had engaged according to our design intentions (e.g. by writing frequent forum posts and responding to others', by everyone speaking in class, or by too many students emailing for help). This issue was held in tension with our flexibility around communication channels and attempts to increase equitable participation. An explicit, shared philosophy helped us to make decisions in the face of pragmatic challenges.

Program philosophy

In 2016, with growing numbers of students and staff, the team began developing an explicit but evolving educational philosophy to underpin its approach to design, practice, evaluation and staff development. In contrast to what we saw as a common dependence in healthcare education on the presence of high-profile educators, we focused on sustainable, developmental, and responsive teaching practices, and aspirational principles of openness, authenticity, vulnerability, and honesty (Fawns, Aitken, Jones, et al., 2021). We drew from theoretical perspectives that helped us to understand how knowledge, agency and performance were negotiated across people and environments, and this theoretical sensitivity helped us to understand how we collaborated as a team and the impact we had on our colleagues, students and the wider community. Example influences included Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of field, capital and habitus; Schatzki's (2001) practice theory; and Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological systems theory. Inspired by an ethic of hospitality (Derrida, 2000), our aspiration was to create a welcoming space in which students could share experiences and develop ideas for application in professional contexts. In doing so, we did not seek equality or standardisation of experience and support, nor a level playing field for all students. Instead, our aim was to advocate differently for each student, allowing them to negotiate the kinds of support personally conceived as most appropriate for them.

Students often had limited control over planning, workload, family, their own health, etc. In response, we focused less on the extent to which students were engaged in particular moments of teaching, and more on how they did, or could, engage across the program life cycle. We aspired to provide sufficient, alternative ways for each student to engage with us, with peers, and with the resources and tasks of the program. Examples included helping student cohorts set up WhatsApp groups for discussions away from staff; providing

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downloadable audio files and text-based workbooks for those whose Internet access made it difficult to join online conversations; and advocating for the funding of improvements to infrastructure in low-resource settings. Each of these endeavours emerged from conversations with students that occurred as intentional or unintentional parts of our courses.

Groundwork for engagement

Through various forms of groundwork (e.g. ongoing personal email exchanges, helping students navigate University systems and processes, advocating for them where necessary), teachers and program administrators gained insights into student perspectives that helped the team bind together disparate aspects of the students' educational journeys. Relationships were prioritised from pre-admission (e.g. where someone showed interest in the program through enquiries or casual chats at a conference), through induction (a two-week program where new students got to know each other and the staff, and familiarised themselves with the technologies and expectations of the program) and the formal program, to post-graduation, where we invited graduates to teach, supervise research students, or speak to potential applicants about their experiences of the program (Fawns et al., 2021c).

Collectively, we saw it as our role to help new students navigate unfamiliar territory with foreign technologies, rules and regulations, systems and conventions. We resisted centralised communications and chatbots in favour of dedicated program administrators who cared about our students. We understood that requests for information can also be ways of seeking contact and initiating relationships. Through thoughtful and interested communication, we built a richer picture of who was joining the program and what mattered to them. From there, we would engage with students about their learning, not only as part of summative assessment but also as part of a collegial relationship. This told us much about our students and how to shape our approach to align with their needs.

In our view, such long-term groundwork for engagement that has already begun well in advance, creates a significant advantage for engagement in particular moments. Students who are already engaged with the program, teachers, peers, and curriculum, are more likely, it seems to us, to arrive at any particular session or task ready to engage. Engagement, whether it is understood as behavioural, cognitive, emotional, multifaceted or relational, is something to cultivate longitudinally, rather than trying to generate it from a standing start. In the next section, I return to the literature to consider these issues in greater depth.

Considerations for longitudinal and relational engagement

Who is engaging with what, and how?

Students engage with peers, educators, courses, programs, institutions, professional bodies and workplaces (Pittaway & Moss, 2014), yet engagement is often framed as something done by or to students. This is supported by seeing engagement in performative terms, emphasising activities that can be observed, measured and reported (Zepke, 2014). Students must then be

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seen to be active, in the performance of ritual engagement (Dyment et al., 2020; Saeed & Zyngier, 2012). This may be framed as support against failure or dropping out (Dyment et al., 2020), or the scaffolding of motivation, self-regulation or autonomy (Young, 2010). However, monitoring engagement (e.g. via log-ins, resource downloads, forum posts, participation in peer activities or quizzes) neglects important aspects of engagement (Dyment et al., 2020). Taken to an extreme, such practices not only leave out 'private, silent, unobserved and solitary practices' (Gourlay, 2015, p. 410) but the agency of people themselves (Hayes, 2019). Engagement becomes a way of enforcing norms, as educators and institutions determine the kind of engagement they expect of students (Dyment et al., 2020).

Claims that students are, or are not, engaged, in a binary sense, ignores their capacity for modulating or varying engagement over time, or for determining the extent to which they comply with teachers' expectations (Fredricks et al., 2004). Students can exercise agency through choosing scheduled activities to attend, what resources to access, or how much effort to invest in tasks (Ashwin & McVitty, 2015). In the Clinical Education Masters, our intention was to create space and structure for students to engage with teachers, peers, ideas and contexts in ways that suited them. Rather than trying to force engagement, we sought to create conditions where students could be intrinsically motivated (Dron, 2023).

For us, mandating how students should engage with their studies was at odds with sustainable learning, where students develop ways of working that work for them, during and after their formal education (Boud & Soler, 2016; Fawns & O'Shea, 2019). Yet, student agency does not simply happen by creating space for it. For example, clear instructions, tasks, and schedules, given sufficiently in advance, are often important to engagement (Marley et al., 2021). And yet, no matter how clear, explicit and tightly-specified the instructions, students will still re-interpret designs into situated practices (Fawns & O'Shea, 2019; Jones, 2013). Open conversations between staff and students are also crucial in helping students to appropriately interpret and complete educational designs (Fawns et al., 2023; Goodyear, 2015), and some students benefit from clearly-structured curricula, others from more space (Fawns et al., 2023). In some cases, enforcing particular forms of engagement to fit the expectations of educators or institutions might impede or disrupt the students' development of attuned working practices.

On the Masters in Clinical Education, important forms of engagement were not visible to us. In conversations after graduation, or in research interviews, we would discover different ways in which students had engaged with our program, including self-directed activities outside of our designed tasks and scheduled events. In Marley et al. (2021), one of our students gave an account of his changing engagement over the program, stating that important aspects of his learning manifested years after finishing. He also explained that his engagement developed over time as he became familiar and comfortable with the methods, spaces and activities of our online program. Given the space and agency, students can develop their own ways of engaging that, hopefully, work for them (Fawns & O'Shea, 2019). Many of our students also continued to engage with each other, and with members of our team, beyond graduation

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(Aitken et al., 2019). For these reasons, it can be valuable to consider engagement from a longer-term, program-level view (Fawns & Sinclair, 2021).

Broadening conceptions of online learning and engagement

In an online context, engagement can be hampered by narrow understandings of what online education *is*. For those unfamiliar with online learning, there are often challenges around an entrenched desire for familiar methods of eliciting social engagement (Fox et al., 2021). Maloney et al. (2023) found that fatigue in online learning and associated challenges of enthusiasm and motivation were related to an 'overexposure to online coursework'. However, they noted that this might be exacerbated through pressure to visibly engage. Online fatigue or demotivation is also complicated by expectations (e.g. whether a student enrolled in an online course in the first place), living, working and studying through a pandemic, a lack of habituated patterns of study and teaching practices in an online context, and a lack of educators' experience and expertise in online course design (Bali & Zamora, 2022; Fawns, Aitken, & Jones, 2021b; Hodges et al., 2020).

The concerns of many educators around lack of engagement in online classes are based on perceptions of the extent to which students pay attention to teachers or participate in teacher-facilitated conversations (e.g. Namboodiri, 2022). This suggests a short-term, teacher-centric conception of engagement, underpinned by an assumption that engagement is generated during class encounters, rather than building on already-existing relationships and ways of communicating. Effective approaches in unfamiliar contexts involve groundwork as well as reconfiguring tasks and timeframes to allow for engagement to happen in different, unfamiliar ways (Hodges et al., 2020; also Stone, Ch. 14 this book).

It only takes a single instance of strong engagement (I have seen many on this program and others) to disprove the notion that students do not engage in online education. Engagement in our program was not contingent just on the particular technologies and methods used, but on combinations of factors (including design and configuration of technologies and learning activities, clarity of instruction, familiarity, attitude, expertise, power relations, opportunities for dialogue, and more). Similarly, common worries about 'online engagement fatigue' (Maloney et al., 2023) are not inherent to online education but a product of particular designs and orchestrations in particular contexts. Attributing quality of engagement to the online modality or particular technologies shuts down possibilities for improvement. Taking a postdigital view, where digital activity is not separate from social and material activity (Fawns, 2019), my colleagues and I have challenged ideas of online learning as socially impoverished, or as disconnected from the physical, social and emotional realities of our students (Fawns et al., 2019). In this, we have been supported by the values-based position of the University of Edinburgh (Bayne & Gallagher, 2021; University of Edinburgh, 2019) and, in particular, influential, practitioner-scholar colleagues based in the University's Digital Education group (see, e.g., the Bayne et al., 2020 'Manifesto for Teaching Online').

Creating space and conditions for longitudinal and relational engagement

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Engagement can be seen as longitudinal (unfolding over time), extending well before and after scheduled sessions (Fawns et al., 2019). From this view, the tasks, conversations and discussion forums set up by the teachers were just forms of punctuation of each of our students' journeys. Each student's learning carried on outside of the formal environments and scheduled events of our program (Fawns & O'Shea 2019), into homes, social spaces, workplaces, and in transit (Fawns et al. 2019). Whether students were obviously engaged in any given moment (were they speaking, were their cameras on, could we see their facial expressions) mattered less than whether, across the program, they could find ways to make meaning and apply learning to their professional contexts.

Longer-term engagement is contingent on a combination of culture, expectations, relationships and sense of community; material arrangements (including different channels for communication); task design; and more. As the case of the MSc in Clinical Education shows, possibilities for engagement can also be supported by different kinds of groundwork that support reciprocal commitment (of students, teachers, courses, and institutions), investment (of time, resources, energy) and involvement (negotiation of different elements towards purposes and values). While there are activities that teachers can set during a scheduled class (e.g. icebreakers, socially-oriented tasks, breakout groups, etc.), engagement is easier within an already-established community. Engaging with students from their first contact with the program, when motivation and enthusiasm are often high, is likely to be the best way to encourage engagement at any other point in time.

Engagement can also be seen as relational. For example, while teaching approaches shape engagement, the engagement of students also shapes the actual and possible approaches to teaching. Stronger relationships make it easier for students to openly discuss challenges, problems, and even perceived shortcomings of task or assessment designs, practices, resources, technological configurations, etc. Strong forms of relational engagement, such as co-participation or co-design approaches, can widen the focus of engagement to how teaching staff are motivated to participate within their own teaching (Matthews et al., 2019). Yet, they also involve risk and vulnerability (Fawns, Aitken, Jones, et al., 2021; Lee, 2021), and being open about the rationales, limitations, and imperfections of teaching (Fawns, Mulherin, Hounsell, et al., 2021). Assumptions that there is a *right way* to do education in a particular discipline, such as clinical education, can obstruct the valuing of diverse backgrounds, settings, perspectives and insights (Fawns, Aitken, Jones, et al., 2021) and get in the way of the valuable learning that teachers can benefit from through engaging with students (Aitken et al., 2022). Such approaches are made more difficult where staff do not feel supported by their institutions. For example, engagement between teachers or course directors and their institutions (Aitken & Hayes, 2021; Fawns, Gallagher, & Bayne, 2021) can also be fraught, with implications for the personal and professional development.

From a relational lens (Gravett, 2023), the responsibility for engagement is shared across students, staff and institutions (Fawns, Aitken, & Jones, 2021a). Educators should design engaging activities; students should take an active role and bring a positive, curious, and

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flexible attitude; the infrastructure should support engaging activities and communication; and institutions should support the professional development and experimentation of educators, and ensure reasonable working conditions.

Conclusions

Engagement is individual and collective, moment-to-moment and extended across time. In many contexts, students do not need to be engaged precisely in the ways, and at the times, their teachers or institutions want them to be. Students can be engaged with a course or a program without being engaged in every designed or scheduled moment. Engagement can fluctuate without it being a triumph or crisis of learning.

In this chapter, I have explored different perspectives on engagement, raising questions about the subjects (e.g. students, educators, institutions) and objects (e.g. peers, educators, tasks, resources, ideas, programs, community, practice contexts) of engagement, and the relations between them. For example, who is responsible for engagement? Is it teachers, who should design and orchestrate engaging activities? Is it students, who should have positive, curious and flexible attitudes? Is it institutions? I have argued that responsibility for engagement is shared across all of these things. Such an 'entangled' (Fawns, 2022) or relational (Gravett, 2023) view rejects blanket statements about what engagement looks like in online or postgraduate education. Instead, it can support conceptions of engagement that take account of how time, work and other commitments are configured in online postgraduate education, and the purposes and values for which postgraduate students undertake programs of study.

If engagement is seen as longitudinal and relational, educators might usefully broaden their focus out from momentary, attentive and visible engagement to longer-term groundwork that supports community-building, student agency, and inclusion. The online, postgraduate context highlights how other responsibilities (e.g. caring, work) can shape engagement with study, and how an apparent lack of engagement might need to be disentangled from a lack of motivation (Stone et al., 2021). The distinction between engagement as a moment-to-moment attentiveness and engagement as a longer-term involvement with a course and its co-participants may also be particularly important in a postgraduate context because of an increased focus on more complex and uncertain forms of knowledge, and a shift in student-teacher relations. Particularly in postgraduate education, engagement must also extend beyond the course itself to informal and professional learning contexts (Aitken, 2021; Fawns, Mulherin, Hounsell, et al., 2021).

Reflecting on an online Masters in Clinical Education, I have illustrated many facets to engagement, many ways to be engaged, and many pathways that students might take through a postgraduate program. A longitudinal and relational view reveals forms of groundwork, design and orchestration that can support engagement, not as the alignment of student activity with predetermined expectations, but as a gradual process, thoughtfully woven into the fabric of an educational program and extending beyond it.

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