

INFORM CONFERENCE | 2017

InForm

Innovative ideas for enhanced
student engagement



ROOM N304

University of Reading Malaysia

15 July 2017

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InForm CONFERENCE 2017

INNOVATIVE IDEAS FOR ENHANCED STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

The International Foundation Programme at the University of Reading Malaysia welcomes you to the eighth annual *InForm* conference and the first *InForm* conference outside the UK.

This year's theme has resulted in a varied and stimulating selection of talks that highlight the importance and complexity of student engagement and the innovative approaches colleagues are taking to enhance it. For the last talk of the day we shall be connecting live with the parallel event happening at the University of Reading UK to interactively watch the keynote speaker Colin Bryson from Newcastle University give the opening talk.

With thought-provoking talks and opportunities for discussion and networking this is also a time to reflect on what we ourselves do and you will be encouraged to share your experiences and offer ideas on key themes identified in the conference. Hopefully you will come away both informed and inspired to try new things.

Special thanks to Bruce Howell of FSLI, University of Reading, for co-ordinating this event and Clare Nukui of Oxford Brookes University who initiated the idea and was involved in early planning.

We look forward to an enjoyable, thought-provoking and *InFormative* day for all.



Dr Mark Peace
Chair of the *InForm* Editorial Board

INFORM Conference 2017

Malaysia Programme

Innovative ideas for enhanced student engagement

University of Reading Malaysia | Room N304

11:00	Registration – Coffee and pastries
11:20 – 11:40	<p>Welcome and conference opening</p> <p>Introduction to InForm, University of Reading Malaysia and Educuity</p>
11:40 – 12:20 Session 1	<p>Positive student engagement through workshops centered on developing intercultural awareness</p> <p><i>Nabila Shariff, University of Nottingham, Malaysia Campus</i></p> <p>In increasingly diverse learning environments, teachers more often than not have a difficult time in understanding how to effectively engage students of different cultures and backgrounds. One of the aspects this presentation will explore is using intercultural awareness to spark student engagement, through self-discovery in a classroom free of boundaries.</p>
12:20 – 13:10	Lunch
13:10 – 13:50 Session 2	<p>Early intervention in student disengagement</p> <p><i>Peter Sturman, University of Nottingham, Ningbo China</i></p> <p>Student end-of-semester pass rates and examination success among preliminary year students at the University of Ningbo Nottingham are positively correlated with higher rates of engagement as measured by class attendance. However, absence rates are higher than desirable. An early intervention strategy was introduced in academic year 2016-17 to try to increase levels of engagement and to determine why students are missing classes. Initial results suggest that the majority of students do not understand the University's Absence and Engagement procedure or, if they do, are not abiding by it. The implications of this for changes to university practice will be discussed as will the need for changes to the early intervention strategy. This two-year programme has allowed for information-based changes in practice, but has also created an additional burden on personal tutors.</p>
14:00 – 14:40 Session 3	<p>Online peer assessment to promote student engagement outside the classroom</p> <p><i>Eoin Patrick, Xi'an-Jiaotong Liverpool University</i></p> <p>Recent online peer assessment tools offer the opportunity to engage students in language development activities outside the classroom, without significantly impacting teacher marking loads. This presentation will explore how one such tool, Moodle Workshop, has been used at an English-medium university in China to facilitate students' academic writing development.</p>
14:40 – 15:10	Refreshments
15:10 – 15:50 Session 4	<p>Low-tech for high engagement: Gratitude practices to enhance autonomous learning</p> <p><i>Saleha Abdul Rahman, Nottingham University Malaysia Campus</i></p> <p>Foundation year students entering university for the first time may find their new independence daunting. This presentation looks at how gratitude practices can be used to help students adjust to these new challenges, be more engaged in their own learning and fare better at university.</p>

11.40–12.20



Nabila Shariff, University of Nottingham, Malaysia Campus

13.10–13.50



Peter Sturman, University of Nottingham, Ningbo China

PRESENTATION OUTLINES

All sessions in Room N304

Positive student engagement through workshops centered on developing intercultural awareness

The session will first introduce working definitions of culture, as used in the workshops with students, on which this entire presentation and its principals is based. It will do this by introducing a scenario that will allow participants/audience to think about where culture comes from and how it affects general behaviour. This will then be followed by the definitions of culture. This will be followed by a description of what the workshops (in a module titled 'Intercultural Awareness' convened and conducted by myself) entailed, the kinds of

activities related to intercultural aspects (such as concepts of particularism, universalism), and specific examples of these activities and how they influenced student engagement.

Student feedback and perception of their engagement and how they were generally affected, is shown in excerpts of reflective logs they were required to fill out pre-workshops, after each of the workshops and post-workshops. This is then linked to heightened student engagement and ideas on how to, based on this, keep it fairly high.

Early intervention in student disengagement

In academic year 2015-2016, research was done on relationship between absences and student pass rates in end-of-year examinations and marks obtained. There was a clear positive correlation between the number of classes attended and higher rates of success and higher grades.

This led to an 'early intervention' policy to support students missing classes. The secondary aim was to determine what the major reasons for missing classes were. Students were invited to meet the tutor to explain their absences and a report was completed which was then returned to the Student Support Officer. In the academic year 2016-17, ninety-two of these were completed enabling a basic examination of the main reasons for absences, assuming, of course, that the students are being entirely truthful.

The data in these reports suggests that between 60 -70% of student absences were due to a combination of ill-health and a lack of understanding of the correct procedures to follow in such circumstances. This has simple and clear implications for university practice for next academic year. An improved system might reduce the number of unauthorized absences. The current system however, is time-consuming and has not led to noticeably greater levels of engagement.

All of the changes to the absence and engagement procedure and the personal tutorial system have been data-led and informed. We now have enough data to make significant improvements for next year which should reduce the number of unauthorized absences and reduce the workload burden on personal tutors.

14.00–14.40



**Eoin Patrick, Xi'an-liaotong
Liverpool University**

Online peer assessment to promote student engagement outside the classroom

Peer assessment (PA), either paper-based or online, allows students to both give and receive feedback on writing in a structured manner, without increasing teacher marking loads. Meta-analyses of studies on PA in a variety of higher education disciplines suggest that peer scores generally correlate well with those awarded by expert markers (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000; Li et al., 2016; van Zundert, Sluijsmans, & van Merriënboer, 2010). Online PA tools (Honeychurch, Barr, Brown, & Hamer, 2012) now also allow for complex assessment arrangements, which would be difficult to administer in paper-based format, to be implemented with relative simplicity (Mostert & Snowball, 2013). However, despite the potential of online PA to engage English learners with additional writing development tasks, reports of its usage for this purpose are limited. This presentation will address this shortcoming by firstly describing how online PA can assist English learners in developing their writing skills through: enhancing self-assessment skills (Reinholz, 2016); exposing them to multiple other students' work; providing them with more individual feedback; and helping them to understand the writing assessment process. The presenter will then introduce one online PA tool, Moodle Workshop (Strang, 2015), and describe how he has used this at an English-medium university in China to help students enhance their English writing skills. Following this, a brief analysis of student feedback on the online PA activities will be presented, as well as an analysis of data from Moodle Workshop itself.

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15.10 – 15.50



Saleha Abdul Rahman,
Nottingham University
Malaysia Campus

Low-tech for high engagement: Gratitude practices to enhance autonomous learning

In the era of gadgets where high-tech applications are applauded, there is sometimes a need for educators to return to low-tech, 'high-touch' approaches to engage students. One high-touch method is the practice of gratitude, which can not only promote engagement in learning but also, besides other benefits, enhance student well-being (Howells 2012). University life can be challenging for anyone, but more so for foundation year students, many of whom come fresh from school and are living away from their family for the first time. There are often many emotional anxieties for these students who are trying to do well in their courses while adapting to the new living and learning environment. Some are indeed able to transition into university life relatively smoothly, but according to Vitasari et. Al. (2010) many need help adjusting. High emotional intelligence has been shown to reduce anxiety and increase resilience, and emotionally intelligent students are more adaptable to new situations (Carver and Scheier 2003). Emotional intelligence, good thinking and an overall positive mind-set can be nurtured through gratitude practices (Emmons and Stern 2013; Howells 2012). This presentation aims to first clarify what

gratitude is (and is not) and then move on to show how gratitude practices can be employed with IFP students in any discipline to enable them to be more 'awake' and engaged in their own learning process.

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16:00 – 16:30



**Bruce Howell, FSLI,
University of Reading Malaysia**

16.40 – 17.25



**Colin Bryson,
Director of Combined Honours
Programme at Newcastle
University and chair of RAISE
(Researching, Advancing and
Inspiring Student Engagement)**

Round table – Enhancing student engagement on IFPs

The four previous sessions have looked at cultural awareness, attendance and early intervention with disengagement, online peer assessment and gratitude practices in relation to student engagement. During the question sections of talks and through discussion in the coffee breaks and lunch other areas of student engagement will undoubtedly be considered. This session is an opportunity for delegates to share their thoughts and conclusions from the whole day with a view to identifying key themes.

Of course the purpose of the conference is to inform and inspire usable, practical and innovative ideas for enhancing student engagement. So while considering key themes, both the engagement challenges and possible solutions will be identified and discussed.

Realising the potential of student engagement

Over the last 10 years or so, student engagement (SE) has moved to centre stage in university policies and practice in the UK. However that has frequently been adopted without considering what the nature of student engagement really might be about. A body of criticism is developing around the mainstreaming of SE (Zepke, 2015; Macfarlane and Tomlinson, 2017) which argues that it has come to serve neo-liberal and managerialist agendas and thus is not beneficial to students nor education. To understand SE requires some examination of the scholarship of SE (e.g. Kahu, 2013). This would show how diverse students are and that engaging students really needs a deeper understanding of the key influences involved in students engaging (Bryson, 2014). I would argue that there is too much current focus on a simplistic practice of 'doing student engagement' on the presupposition that this is sufficient to enhance (some of) the student experience. However deep engagement is a prerequisite to the type of transformative learning that is the true purpose of HE (Johansson and Felten, 2015) - and about 'becoming not having' (Fromm, 1977).

Universal engagement is key- where all students not only are encouraged and supported to engage but also that recognition

is given that they bring their own experiences and values to how they want to engage and for what purpose. So how can we be truly inclusive in developing effective practice? What works and why does it work? Working in partnership between students and staff (and others) is likely be a fruitful way forward.

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The submission of papers is now invited for the sixteenth edition of *InForm* from members of the academic community associated with international foundation programmes. Issue 17 will be published in December 2017.

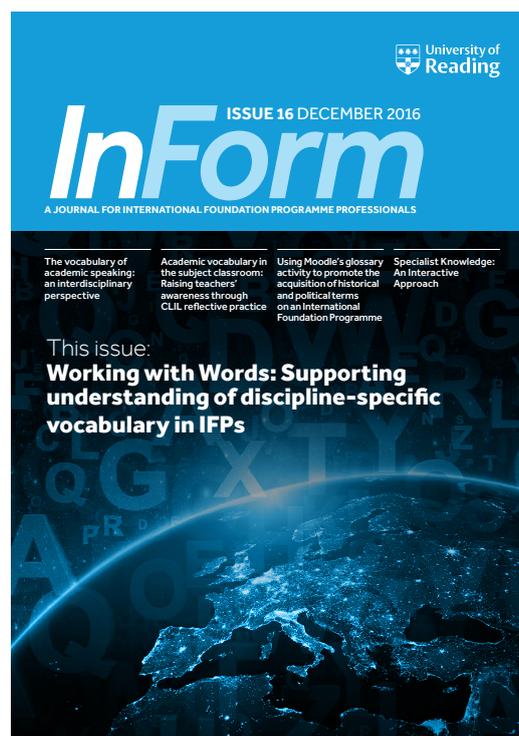
We are interested in articles related to the variety of academic disciplines commonly found across international foundation programmes and remind contributors that *InForm* is not predominantly an English language teaching journal. *InForm* also includes a letters page with readers' responses to the articles included in previous editions. Letters should be no longer than 200 words.

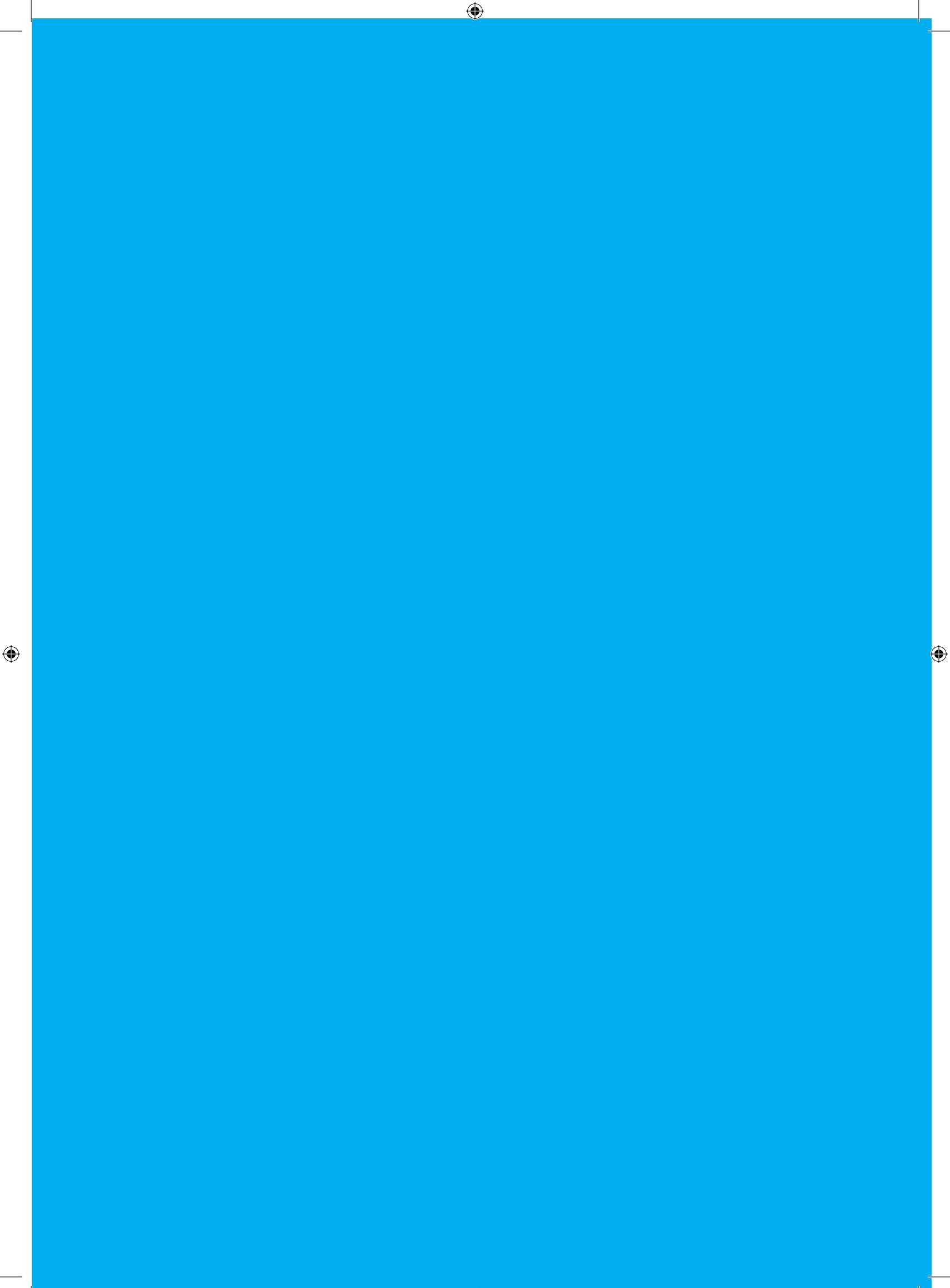
Journal articles (of no more than 1200 words) should be sent by email to inform@reading.ac.uk by 12.00 pm on 31 October 2017.

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