ARE CHANGES NECESSARY? 
ENHANCING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT ON THE INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION PROGRAMME

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OUTLINE

• Background & rationale
• Aims & research questions
• Methodology
• Findings & conclusions
• Recommendations
• Q & A
ARE CHANGES NECESSARY?

*Evolution* of International Foundation Programmes – *recognising* a new environment and *adapting to change.*
2017/18 cohort: IFP tutors experienced and observed lower levels of student engagement

- Lower class attendance
- Higher frequency of incomplete homework and some assignments

Investigation into student engagement

First challenge = what is meant by ‘student engagement’?
DEFINING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

• “Student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution.” (Trowler, 2010, p.3)

• “Engagement is both a process and an outcome.” (Bryson, Cooper and Hardy, 2010)

• A complex, multifaceted construct (Kahu, 2013), thus hard to determine.
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT CONSTRUCTS

- **behavioural**: student behaviour & teaching practices
- **psychological**: cognitive, affective aspects
- **socio-cultural**: impact of broader social factors & context
- **holistic approach**: drawing together the different research on student engagement

(Kahu, 2013)
Figure 1. Conceptual framework of engagement, antecedents and consequences.
KAHU (2013)

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of engagement, antecedents and consequences.
SCOPE OF STUDY

• **Snapshot** of student engagement

• **Broad** study – affective, cognitive and behavioural aspects (Kahu, 2013)

• **Exploratory** study
AIMS OF RESEARCH ...

To identify...

• **to what extent** IFP students were engaged

• **factors** that affected student engagement

• **possible reasons** for lower engagement levels

• **to make some recommendations** to enhance student engagement for future IFP cohorts
RESEARCH QUESTIONS...

RQ1. To what extent are students engaged in the IFP?

RQ2. What are the factors that affect student engagement?
**METHODOLOGY**

**STAGE 1**

- **online questionnaire**
  - administered to all IFP students in Spring term 2019 (week 3); slow response rate initially; total = 34/80

**STAGE 2**

- **focus group session**
  - conducted in the Spring term 2019 (week 8); 6 participants out of 7
QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

• A total of 23 questions
• Focused on **engagement in** the classroom and **outside** the classroom.
• **Behavioural construct** – frequency of time spent, participation, interaction.
• **Cognitive** – higher thinking skills
• **Affective** – preferences, interests, sense of belonging
• **Internal** and **external** factors that could affect student engagement
1st MAIN FINDING: CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

How much do you enjoy doing the following activities?

**individual work**
- Very much: 19 (55.9%)
- Quite a bit: 12 (35.3%)
- Sometimes: 3 (8.8%)
- Not much: 0

**pair work**
- Very much: 6 (17.6%)
- Quite a bit: 13 (38.2%)
- Sometimes: 14 (41.2%)
- Not much: 1 (2.9%)

**group work**
- Very much: 4 (11.8%)
- Quite a bit: 6 (17.6%)
- Sometimes: 14 (41.2%)
- Not much: 10 (29.4%)

RQ1. To what extent are students engaged in the IFP?

1st Very much 55.9%
2nd Sometimes 41.2%
3rd Sometimes 41.2%
SUMMARY OF 1\textsuperscript{ST} FINDING

Classroom Activities

- there seems to be a mismatch in terms of classroom activities that are used with the activities that students prefer to do.
How often do you use the following medium to discuss or complete an assignment with your classmates?

**email**
- All the time: 1 (2.9%)
- Often: 5 (14.7%)
- Sometimes: 9 (26.5%)
- Never: 19 (55.9%)

**phone call**
- All the time: 1 (2.9%)
- Often: 3 (8.8%)
- Sometimes: 11 (32.4%)
- Never: 19 (55.9%)

**one to one messaging**
- All the time: 6 (17.6%)
- Often: 12 (35.3%)
- Sometimes: 14 (41.2%)
- Never: 2 (5.9%)

**group messaging**
- All the time: 6 (17.6%)
- Often: 11 (32.4%)
- Sometimes: 9 (26.5%)
- Never: 8 (23.5%)
COMMUNICATION (WITH TUTORS)

How often do you communicate with your module tutors in the following way?

**Email**
- All the time: 9 (26.5%)
- Often: 10 (29.4%)
- Sometimes: 13 (38.2%)
- Never: 2 (5.9%)

**Face to face in class**
- All the time: 7 (20.6%)
- Often: 10 (29.4%)
- Sometimes: 16 (47.1%)
- Never: 1 (2.9%)

**Face to face outside class**
- All the time: 2 (5.9%)
- Often: 2 (5.9%)
- Sometimes: 17 (50%)
- Never: 13 (38.2%)

RQ1. To what extent are students engaged in the IFP?
SUMMARY OF 2ND FINDING

Communication

- there seems to be a mismatch in terms of how IFP tutors communicate with students and how students prefer to communicate.
FOCUS GROUP DESIGN

AIM: to explore and extend some of the main findings from the questionnaire

WHEN: conducted in spring term (week 8)

WHO: out of 34 respondents, 6 volunteered

TIME: approximately 1.5 hours

FOCUS: questions were based on 2 main topics

Topic 1: Activities in the classroom

Topic 2: Communication
FOCUS GROUP: TOPIC 1

"I prefer pair work because you have two minds working together."

"Sometimes the team doesn’t mix well"

"I think pair work flows more naturally...it’s the perfect in between really"

"When group work really starts to flow, it works well."

"I prefer individual work...I think the most reliable person is myself."

"Pair work can be hard too ... if one person misses the class, you’re just left alone!"
FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS 1

Challenges:
• Time consuming – e.g. decision making
• Challenging activity – e.g. mixed ability groups
• Hard to organise group meetings outside hours
• More complicated than pair work and individual work

Suggestions:
• Tutor can monitor group progress
• Review grading of group assignments
• Tutor intervention to assign tasks to abilities?
• Students choose their own groups?
FOCUS GROUP: TOPIC 2

“I find group messaging the most convenient...that way everyone gets to see what’s happening.”

“Students are always on the phone so Whatsapp or Messenger work best.”

“I never use email to contact my classmates ... it’s not useful!”

“I usually use a phone call because most of the time people don’t respond to messages.”

“I personally have a problem with group messaging ... some people mute the group chats!”

“If I email people, they barely check their emails at times, so I would prefer to call or meet face to face.”
FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS 2

• **Group messaging** - depending on urgency, formality and context, most students prefer group chats, e.g. Whatsapp for its convenience, accessibility, speed of delivery
• Some students prefer **face to face** meet ups
• **Email** – sometimes used to share documents

**Challenges:**
• Some students muted group chats
• Students do not regularly check or respond to emails
“I usually email my teachers if I have a question.”

“If I didn’t understand something in class, I’ll ask a question after class as I don’t want to disrupt the lesson.”

“Communication with tutors”

“I find tutorials helpful – face to face is effective to receive some advice.”

“If it’s a quick question, then face to face might be fine … if not then I would suggest a pre-arranged meeting to avoid wasting time.”
FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS 2

Challenges:
• Important email messages are often overlooked
• Opportunities to communicate with tutors can be limited
• Effective use of social media – does it work for students?

Suggestions:
• Use casual modes of communication, e.g. social media
• Nominate Student Ambassadors (for communication)
• Google Classroom – effective?
• Create a culture of checking emails regularly
CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the questionnaire and focus group:

• **Mismatch** in terms of the **classroom activities** that we use to enhance student engagement **with what students prefer** (consistent with other studies, e.g. Ulbrich et.al, 2011).

• **Mismatch** between **how we communicate** with students and **how students prefer to communicate** (Selwyn, 2012; Downes 2010).

So, are changes necessary? **YES, definitely!**
## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Reconsidering Classroom Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Value and Rationale</strong></td>
<td>How can we make students aware of the <strong>value</strong> of certain activities? Should we ask students to provide a <strong>rationale</strong> and <strong>reflect</strong> on their decisions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of activities</strong></td>
<td>Is <strong>group work</strong> as effective as we think? Can individual work and pair work be just as engaging?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching the strategies</strong></td>
<td>Do we actually teach our students <strong>how to</strong> do group work? What is effective? An underlying assumption that they know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Active decision making</strong></td>
<td>Should students have a say in the activities they do? Should we allow students to <strong>choose how</strong> they do activities? Being involved. Giving them empowerment and responsibility.</td>
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</tbody>
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# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Reconsidering Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources for Communication</th>
<th>Are we/ universities investing enough resources into communication?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modes of communication</td>
<td>Are we communicating effectively?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Are our university platforms outdated?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What practical things can we do to change?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>Is social media our saviour?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How can we embrace it rather than avoid it?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How can we be more social media savvy, friendly?</td>
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“Members of the net generation use the web differently, they network differently, and they learn differently. When they start at university, traditional values on how to develop knowledge collide with their values.”.

Ulbrich et al. (2011)
ANY QUESTIONS ...?
REFERENCES


