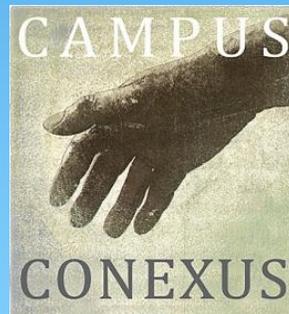


Student engagement and identity – case of first year students in education and information science domains



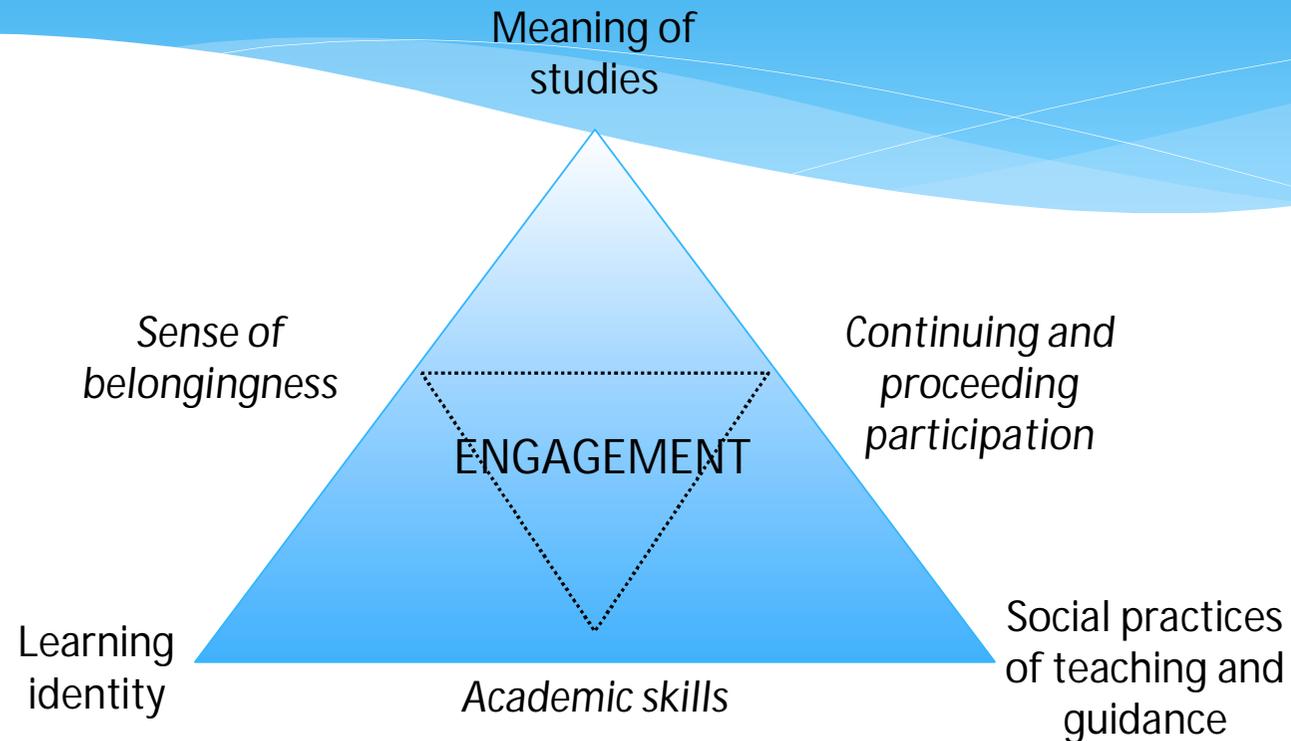
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Engagement and identity?

- * There are versatile perspectives for examining student engagement in higher education
 - * traditionally the focus of engagement has been in persistence, academic achievement and completion of studies (or non-completion/drop-outs) (Astin 1993; Tinto 1997; Kuh et. al 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini 1991; 2005)
- * In the identity related views of engagement the focus is on the learning process and student's self-conceptions
 - * how individual student's sense of belongingness is developing, how participation in study-related communities takes place and how identity is intertwined in the student role (see Trowler 2010)
- * Identity and engagement in the beginning of studies are connected to
 - * own learning management, certainty of the studying field choice, prioritisation of the studies and how capable student is seeing him/herself in the new academic learning environment (i.e. Korhonen 2012; Korhonen & Rautopuro 2012)

Engagement model (Korhonen 2012)



Engagement is an interactional relationship between:

- a) *sense of belongingness*,
- b) *proceeding participation*, and
- c) *artistry of academic learning*

(Korhonen 2012; Poutanen et. al 2012)

Research desing and questions

- * The conducted research consisted of two parts:
 - A) piloting a quantitative questionnaire (Nexus-questionnaire) for 1st year students and for their self-evaluation of learning and engagement approaches (58 respondents from education and information science domains)
 - B) qualitative semi-structured interview for selected group of 1st year students (7 education science students)

- * Research questions for the quantitative part:
 - * 1. How does the Nexus-questionnaire work as a tool for 1st year students' self-evaluation and identification of their learning and studying?
 - * 2. Does the questionnaire reveal specific kinds of engagement orientations among 1st year students and are these connected to identity development?

- * Research questions for the qualitative part:
 - * 1. How do the 1st year students engage in their studies from the perspective of personal experience, social participation and academic skills?
 - * 2. What kind of differences are there between them who have done academic studies before and them who haven't done any before the first year at the university?

Quantitative part of the study: Nexus-questionnaire for the 1st year students

- * 72 closed questions + background questions and open questions
- * 5-point Likert-scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree)

- * Measurements used in the Nexus-questionnaire design process:
 - * OPPI-questionnaire (Univ. of Helsinki) (Parpala et.al 2012); based on ETLO (Experiences of Teaching and Learning Questionnaire) and ASSIST (Approaches and Study Skills Inventory for Students) questionnaires
 - * MED NORD (Lonka et.al 2008); a questionnaire for evaluating medical students' orientations and well-being
 - * IGSO (Inventory of general study orientations) (Mäkinen & Olkinuora 2002); a questionnaire for general orientations towards studying in HE
 - * CEQ (Course Experience Questionnaire) (Ramsden 1991; Wilson, Lizzio & Ramsden 1997; Trigwell & Ashwin 2006); teaching evaluation and feedback questionnaire

Piloting of the self-evaluation questionnaire

- * During 2012-13 the Nexus-questionnaire has been piloted for first year students in two units at University of Tampere: in School of Education (EDU) and in School of Information Sciences (SIS).
 - * in both teaching units there has acted 3 piloting groups (first year tutoring groups)
 - * students in piloting groups have answered to the questionnaire and received feedback information has been used as a basis for discussions in tutoring groups
 - * piloting group tutors has been interviewed as well

Main parts of the Nexus -questionnaire

- * *Background information*
 - * questions on study- and life situation
- * *I Studying and learning*
 - * systematic, goal-oriented learning, agency as a learner
- * *II Meaningfulness of the studies and study load*
 - * interest in study field, prioritisation of studies and study load
- * *III Learning environment and development of teaching*
 - * evaluations on learning environment and teaching and experiences on assessment and feedback
- * *IV Academic skills and work-life competences*
 - * evaluations on own academic skills

Interview part of the study

- * Interviewees: seven 1st year education students
 - * *Two specific groups: Four* of the interviewees did not have any academic studies before and *three* of them did
- * Semi-structured interview: the interview was structured with three themes using engagement model as a base (Korhonen 2012)
- * Three themes:
 - * 1. Personal experience (sense of belongingness)
 - * 2. Social participation
 - * 3. Academic skills

The forming scales in Nexus-questionnaire (sum variables)

* Approaches to learning and studying:

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| Meaning-oriented and deep approach to learning | 5 items, alfa 0.75 |
| Systematic, goal-directed studying | 6 items, alfa 0.83 |
| Experienced meaning of studies and prioritisation | 4 items, alfa 0.71 |
| Fact-oriented knowledge conception | 4 items, alfa 0.62 |
| Experienced heavy work-load | 5 items, alfa 0.76 |
| Task avoidance and performance-orientation | 4 items, alfa 0.63 |

* Identity and expertise growth:

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| Strengthening identity and self-belief | 6 items, alfa 0.71 |
|--|--------------------|

* Evaluations on learning environment and teaching:

| | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Supportative teaching | 6 items, alfa 0.72 |
| Generic skills development | 6 items, not evaluated yet |
| Appropriate assessment | 5 items, partly evaluated |
| Academic communality | 4 items, alfa 0.76 |
| Student peer group communality | 5 items, alfa 0.74 |

Self-evaluated learning approaches and engagement

- * Principal component analysis produced two different types of engagement orientations:

Rotated Component Matrix

| | Component | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | Academic orientation | Non- academic orientation |
| GOAL-DIRECTED_STUDYING | ,882 | |
| TASK_AVOIDANCE | -,775 | ,242 |
| MEANINGFUL_STUDIES | ,617 | |
| HEAVY_WORK-LOAD | | ,864 |
| FACT_ORIENTED_KNOWLEDGE_CONCEPTION | -,320 | ,757 |
| DEEP_APPROACH | ,369 | -,446 |

Engagement orientations and the other Nexus-scales

- * Academic orientation has correlative connections to the strengthening identity, supportative teaching and communal nature of student groups
- * On the other hand, non-academic orientation seems to correlate negatively to the belongingness of academic community

| | | Correlations | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| | | Academic orientation | Non-academic orientation |
| IDENTITY | Pearson Correlation | ,410** | -,238 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | ,003 | ,089 |
| | N | 52 | 52 |
| SUPPORTATIVE_TEACHING | Pearson Correlation | ,329* | -,268 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | ,019 | ,057 |
| | N | 51 | 51 |
| APPROPRIATE_ASSESMENT | Pearson Correlation | -,058 | -,240 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | ,691 | ,094 |
| | N | 50 | 50 |
| ACADEMIC_COMMUNALITY | Pearson Correlation | ,199 | -,445** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | ,162 | ,001 |
| | N | 51 | 51 |
| STUDENT_COMMUNALITY | Pearson Correlation | ,302* | ,126 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | ,031 | ,379 |
| | N | 51 | 51 |

Interview results

- * Main findings in the thematic content analysis:
- * *No expected differences between the two selected interview groups*
- * *1. The meaning of autonomy*
 - * *"--that you really have to take care of yourself and define by yourself what and when and why you do something. That nobody is saying to you why you have to do it this way"*
- * *2. The meaning of communality*
 - * *"Yeah, it's important that when coming to the uni, there is this group to go with, to eat and sit next to at the lecture. -- So that there is this group to be with."*

Interview results

- * *3. The meaning of planning and self-determination*
- * *"I think that you have to be able to force yourself to do something also when you don't feel like doing it. That you somehow hold to the things"*
- * *4. The meaning of the "academic thinking"*
- * *"It's like applying a theory to a problem. In High School it was like reading something and then writing it down. Here it's a lot more own critical thinking."*
- * *5. The meaning of gap years*
- * *"And even if it was only one year, but I could think over who I am and all that. - That gave me strength to believe in myself and that kind of stuff"*

Interview results

- * *Other interesting notices:*
- * The motives to apply to the university, the personal meaning of the studies and need for support were experienced in a very individual way.
- * Is it easy for the students to approach teachers? Does there exist a special academic threshold for studying and expertise in the university (Poutanen et. al 2012)?
- * The contradiction between the expectations and demands

First year student saying

- * *"University as a studying place has come up with the goods, it has been a very pleasant environment to study. I liked it in High School as well but this independent way of studying and having competent professors, this all just works out very well for me"*