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Factors enhancing and impeding engagement of first-year students

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Academic engagement

- ⑩ Students' effort to academic activities
- ⑩ Three elements of academic engagement:
 - ⑩ Behavioural engagement
 - ⑩ positive conduct, effort, participation
 - ⑩ Emotional engagement
 - ⑩ interest, identification, belonging, positive attitude towards learning
 - ⑩ Cognitive engagement
 - ⑩ Intellectual investment to understand learning contents, acquire skills and implement self-regulation strategies

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Studying at university is demanding

- ⑩ Development of academic expertise is a demanding and long process
- ⑩ Students need:
 - ⑩ Critical thinking and problem-solving skills
 - ⑩ Skills and courage to create own understanding of knowledge
 - ⑩ Skills for independent studying and group work
 - ⑩ Motivation, interest and perseverance
 - ⑩ Good self-regulation skills to monitor and develop own learning and studying and to take responsibility for own studies
 - ⑩ Strong belief in own capabilities and skills

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The following concepts are central in research on student learning

- ⑩ Self-regulation
 - ⑩ Skills to plan, monitor and evaluate own study process and learning outcomes
- ⑩ Strong self-efficacy beliefs
 - ⑩ A belief of being successful in a specific task
- ⑩ Deep approach to learning
 - ⑩ Aiming at understanding study contents and applying deep-level processes, such as analysing, comparing, and critical evaluation
- ⑩ Disposition to understand for oneself
- ⑩ Cooperation and social skills
- ⑩ Intrinsic motivation and interest
- ⑩ Academic engagement

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The importance of first-year experiences

- ⑩ Students enter the University usually with strong self-efficacy beliefs and high motivation and expectations after completing the demanding entrance examinations with excellent success
- ⑩ Being among the very best students can be difficult for some
 - ⑩ 'From being the best to being only an average student'

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Same environmental factors have individual effects

- ⑩ Students' experiences are affected by their study motivation, interest, and approach to learning
- ⑩ Also life situation and personal characteristics have an effect
- ⑩ Thus, the teaching-learning environment is always subjectively experienced



Engagement of first-year students

Factors enhancing

- ⑩ Personal interest
- ⑩ Intrinsic motivation
- ⑩ Strong self-efficacy beliefs
- ⑩ Good self-regulation skills
- ⑩ Good time-management skills

Factors impeding

- ⑩ Unclear personal interests
- ⑩ Only external motivation or lack of motivation
- ⑩ Low self-efficacy beliefs
- ⑩ Problems with self-regulation
- ⑩ Tendency to procrastinate



An example of self-regulation to enhance engagement

- ⑩ *My studying has become much more efficient and for this my calendar is important. I need to leave time for studying and from the calendar I can see what times I can use for studying. Basically it is the days for studying and the evenings for the family, so it is necessary for me to use the daytime efficiently. I try to do the best I can and get my studies to proceed smoothly, not with perfect performance, because I have to be realistic.*



An example of poor self-regulation impeding engagement

- ⑩ *Lazy. Aimless. Floating. So I'm not a kind of person who has clear long-term objectives. I could be more active. In high school I liked that someone was watching and monitoring me. At university I should also have someone with authority to push me forward. You know, it's too easy here to think that I will do this the next year, so delaying is not that harmful. I know that some students succeed in being efficient and organized, but I'm not the only one who are like this.*



An example of personal interest enhancing engagement

- ⑩ *I enjoy studying and learning hugely. I am very attached to my own major subject, but I would also like to explore what else I can learn here outside my major subject because I want to learn things deeply and broadly. I want to gain thinking and writing skills as well and absorb information from all possible sources.*



An example of a lack of interest impeding engagement

- ⑩ *To be honest, I selected this major, because in this way it was easy for me to enter this University. The subject itself was not particularly interesting, but I have always been good in it. So I thought to start with it and change later to another major. I had aims to finish the required amount of credits, but then many things happened and I did not earn so many credits.*



An example of poor self-efficacy beliefs impeding engagement

- ⑩ *I feel sometimes that this is too difficult for me, that my skills are not good enough. Some task instructions are so unclear that I have difficulties in beginning studying. I have even talked to a teacher and received further instructions and hints how to start the assignment, but somehow everything vanished from my head and I wasn't able to get started. Now I'm afraid and doubting whether I have any skills to write essays, for example, but I just have to try.*



An example of poor time-management skills impeding engagement

- ⑩ *Just thinking of a calendar gives me creeps. So I don't have a calendar, because I feel that it's controlling my life. However, I finally gave up very reluctantly and started to use a mobile calendar. That, however, was actually a good thing, because when it beeps, it reminds me of things. Maybe I just feel that others have more free time than I have. Maybe others are just better in organizing. Because I'm such a drifting person, my use of time is not efficient, I realize that.*



An example of desire to learning, deep approach and strong engagement

- ⑩ *I have this constant hunger for information, I always find new things which I want to explore in more depth and I feel I need to find out more about this and that, and sometimes I end up on a number of different paths.*



Recommendations and instructions for beginner students from a “fast-pace student”

Design a timetable that suits you. It is worthwhile to reserve the textbooks in advance, many students do not prepare for this and it takes time. Reading depends on your own interest. Those who are interested in reading stay at the library. Motivation is important and it is worthwhile maintaining it. It is important that you are aware of your own learning strategies when you are reading. If they are not working, you should try another way. To me it would be ideal if I could discuss these contents of books with somebody at work or ask some mates here. And at the library I could discuss the content even if the other person is not reading the same [textbook]. I am looking for examples from real life with my eyes open. When I am going home from the library, for example, on the way to the railway station I notice and consider all sorts of juridical issues around me. For instance, when I was reading for criminal law [exam] I was walking on street and was going to step onto zebra crossing and considered that if I now jump onto the road and a car runs over me, so would it be that [the driver of car] acted negligently or myself. And when I am travelling by train, when I buy a ticket and use it, it is a matter of private law.



What follows from heavy workload?

- ⑩ Heavy workload hinders the development of individual interest
- ⑩ Under a heavy workload students
 - ⑩ feel frustrated
 - ⑩ lack motivation
 - ⑩ have difficulties to concentrate
 - ⑩ feel that they do not have possibilities to concentrate on own areas of interest
 - ⑩ suffer from their poor learning outcomes



- ⑩ *I think it's frightening that I have started to doubt my interest. I don't know why. Maybe it's because I don't have time to concentrate on understanding and thinking properly. The schedule is so tight that I cannot do else than read fast and try to learning as much as possible.*



What can we do to help students to engage better?

- ⑩ Taking students as members of the academic community
- ⑩ Enhancing peer interaction
- ⑩ Helping students to create and maintain their study motivation
- ⑩ Supporting students to develop their study skills, especially self-regulation and the use of deep study processes
- ⑩ Helping students to create strong self-efficacy beliefs by giving feedback and providing experiences of success

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