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International inclusive teaching and learning

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Abstract

Digital higher education has recently become a vital necessity rather than, as sometimes considered, a luxury or even a choice. This shift has been driven by a number of factors, but most recently in 2020, this was due to a rapid need to find ways to maintain higher education provision in spite of the Covid-19 pandemic situation. Teaching and learning in higher education has traditionally been considered an onsite activity; but initial digital developments in information technology led to increased resource access, while subsequent digital developments in communications technology led to increased social, communicative and collaborative access. International students can now often access higher education through digital means, yet there are additional factors that come into play that can affect modes and forms of teaching and learning. This chapter explores how digital higher education might provide appropriately for the international and inclusive practice that it seeks to support.

Keywords: inclusive learning, inclusive teaching, international practices, online education, digital higher education, digital interactions.

Introduction

Digital higher education has recently become a vital necessity rather than, as sometimes considered, a luxury or even a choice (Anderson, 2020). This shift has been driven by a number of factors, but most recently in 2020, this was due to a rapid need to find ways to maintain higher education provision in spite of the Covid-19 pandemic situation (Ali, 2020).

Teaching and learning in higher education has traditionally been considered an onsite activity (Kromydas, 2017); to gain access to higher education, across the centuries, this has involved increasing levels of student mobility (Lanzendorf & Kehm, 2010). Distance learning through postal and courier services, and later through radio and television technologies, enabled early forms of distance and digital higher education (Anderson & Simpson, 2012). These forms of provision led to some reduced student mobility, but more significantly perhaps, to increased access for wider student groups (those with less mobile opportunity) (Moisey, 2004). More recently, initial digital developments in information technology led to increased resource access from higher education (Crampton et al., 2012), while subsequent digital developments in communications technology led to increased social, communicative and collaborative access (Llorent-Vaquero et al., 2020). The ability to take advantage of more social, communicative and collaborative access has been paralleled by shifts in concerns for developing online and networked teaching and learning practices (Beetham & Sharpe, 2013). In 2021, digital technologies are being widely used to support teaching and learning, both onsite and at a distance. Indeed, the distance that can be reached through uses of these digital technologies is often recognized as being limited only by technological access – of local technology devices for sending and receiving, of networks, internet availability and bandwidth

levels (Khalid & Pedersen, 2016; West, 2015). To address such limitations, these technological factors are often regarded as those that should determine forms of provision from higher education, determining teaching and learning online practices that are feasible and accessible for all at a distance (Azuma & Grossman, 2001). However, whilst technological factors can clearly be major causes of enabling or hindering specific teaching and learning practices in digital higher education, the situation in reality is far more complex. Two key features to consider in this more complex context are international and inclusive dimensions (Lawrie et al., 2017).

International students can now often access higher education through digital means (Dziuban et al., 2018), yet there are additional factors that come into play that can affect modes and forms of teaching and learning. These range, for example, across temporal concerns (associated with time zone differences of the teacher and learner), to cultural concerns (associated with perceptions of effective pedagogical practices in teaching and learning) (Johnson & Inoue, 2003) and confidence and facilities available to higher education tutors (Soomro et al., 2020). Even taking these two features of concern into account, the importance of the second dimension - inclusivity - is clear. It is important to ensure wide accessibility, for those with disabilities, providing, for example, alternative formats and captioning of recordings (The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, 2016). In this context, some authors have raised the importance of considering cognitive, teaching, social and learning presences when engaged in supporting inclusivity through digital online practices (Garrison et al., 2000). Other authors have raised the importance of considering appropriate blended and hybrid balances, of forms and balances of synchronous and asynchronous activity when engaging students online (Murphy et al., 2011). In this chapter, two conceptual elements are used to explore key factors that influence international inclusive teaching and learning in digital higher education. These elements (one focusing on exclusivity factors (Castro et al., 2017) and the other on dimensions of engagement (Kahu, 2013)) will be used to explore and discuss strengths and weaknesses of current practices as well as pointers to consider to support effective future needs, if digital higher education is to provide appropriately for the international and inclusive practice that it seeks to support.

A conceptual framework in the international inclusive education context

In this section, two elements of a conceptual framework will be described. The conceptual framework provides detail through which evidence (in this paper, two case study elements that follow this section), can be viewed. The conceptual framework focuses on two key perspectives crucial to international inclusive teaching and learning. The first is exclusivity factors (that can exclude individuals or groups or countries), but which through being appropriately and adequately addressed can support inclusivity. The second is dimensions of engagement (between student and student, student and tutor, and student and resources).

Exclusivity factors

Exclusivity factors are identified in this chapter through a collation of factors from complimentary sources. A range of sources (Burgstahler, 2015; Passey, 2013; Sun & Chen, 2016) explore factors that relate to tutors' uses of technology, from tutor, learner and institutional perspectives. These factors can be summarized as, from a learner perspective: access to digital technology resources; digital technology competence; and level of interest. From an institutional perspective, the factors concern: functionality of technologies that are used; specific forms of software and hardware that are used; technical support to address issues; and pedagogic support. From the tutor perspective, the factors cover: experience and competence; pedagogic applications used; and interpersonal skills.

Dimensions of engagement

Dimensions of engagement are concerned with factors that positively support engagement between tutors and students, students and students, and students and resources. Gunuc (2014) identifies a range of factors in this respect: features of valuing; cognitive engagement; emotional engagement (both between peers, and with the tutor); and behavioural engagement. Pickford (2016) delineates some of these factors further, identifying intellectual as well as cognitive engagement; social, psychological and participatory as well as emotional engagement; and procedural and transactional as well as behavioural engagement.

The holistic conceptual framework

Taking all of the factors from the sources above that are concerned with potential exclusivity and with positively supporting engagement, a holistic conceptual framework can be created (see Table 1) to consider the factors that could lead to successful international inclusive teaching and learning (or not).

Table 1: A conceptual framework to consider exclusivity and engagement for international inclusive teaching and learning

Factor	How this can influence positively (inclusion)	How this can influence negatively (exclusion)
Learner access to digital technology resources	Full access to asynchronous and synchronous activity enables inclusivity	Access to asynchronous activities only may lead to exclusivity
Time differences	Time differences are recognized, discussed and accommodated where possible	Time differences are not seen as being an important factor
Learner digital technology competence	Learners can gain full access and do not feel disadvantaged compared to others	Learners can feel disadvantaged compared to others, even regarding speed or facility of access
Learner level of interest	Cognitive and intellectual engagement are likely	Cognitive and intellectual engagement are less likely
Functionality of technologies used by the tutor	Learners can engage fully with the activities that the teacher sets up	Learners may have only partial access if certain functions are not accessible to them in their local context, if country restrictions to specific synchronous software apply
Specific forms of software and hardware used by the tutor	Learners can access all activities and resources that are available to them	Learners may not be able to easily access certain activities or resources
Technical support to address issues for the tutor	Disengagement is minimized for the learner	Disengagement can arise if technical issues are not able to be addressed readily
Pedagogic applications used by the tutor	Cognitive and social engagement are positively supported	Cognitive and social engagement may be reduced
Pedagogic support for the tutor	Engagement can be enhanced when alternatives are explored	Engagement can remain low when there are no alternatives available

Factor	How this can influence positively (inclusion)	How this can influence negatively (exclusion)
Tutor experience and competence	Learners' needs may be identified and accommodated	Learners' needs may not be noticed
Tutor interpersonal skills	Social and behavioural engagement are recognized and accommodated	Social and behavioural engagement may not be accommodated
Institutional or tutor features of valuing	Learner voices are valued and carefully considered	Learner voices (even silent voices) may not be heard or even dismissed
Cognitive engagement	Reasons for interest are considered and integrated into tutor practice	Reasons for interest are not considered
Intellectual engagement	Enquiry, questioning and critical concern are focal aspects integrating perspectives through a decolonized curriculum and pedagogic practice	Enquiry, questioning and critical concern are considered less important than subject material
Emotional engagement between peers	Peers are encouraged to support each other	Peers remain largely isolated and unknown to each other
Emotional engagement between learners and the tutor	Trust and understanding is developed between learners and with the tutor	Trust and understanding are not developed and may lead to mistrust and misunderstanding
Social engagement	The voices of learners are welcomed and encouraged	Learner voices can be ignored or dismissed
Psychological engagement	There is empathy for diversity	A lack of empathy for diversity may lead to disengagement
Participatory engagement	Engagement and involvement are positively encouraged	Engagement and involvement may be positively discouraged
Behavioural engagement	Requiring different forms of behaviours in different activities can provide for variety	A lack of variety may lead to individuals not engaging behaviourally at all
Procedural engagement	Procedures may be offered in a variety of ways to increase inclusivity	Unclear procedures may lead to exclusion
Transactional engagement	Differences are accommodated for variations in how power and respect are recognized	No variation in power and respect is recognized or accommodated

A case in context

The methodological approach undertaken in describing the detail of this case is autoethnography (a methodological approach discussed more in the context of supporting digital higher education in [ref. Lee chapter](#)). Through this methodological approach, the intention is for personal experiences to be related, details to be explored, and meaning to be exposed (Chang, 2008), in a style that Besio (2020, p.243) refers to as biographical

autoethnography. I will explore personal experiences and relate these to wider issues and understandings. The factors in Table 1 are used as a framework to elicit experiences, details and meaning. The case considered is a doctoral programme that is run online, except (normally) for a week-long residential in the first and second years of the programme. Although this case considers a doctoral programme, the details are considered relevant and can relate also to online undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

The programme caters for professional people who wish to undertake a doctorate part-time. These individuals are in employment, often have family responsibilities, and may be located world-wide. The programme runs once a year, taking forward some 25-30 doctoral students in each annual cohort. The first two years of the programme are modular, while the latter years involve a long-study in more traditional thesis form. As the programme involves learners from across the world, international inclusive teaching and learning is an important consideration and requirement for all those involved in providing and supporting the programme. As a tutor currently responsible for a module and the overall residential programme of the doctoral programme, these two elements are explored in this section: a module that runs each year, some 18 weeks in length; and the residential element that runs for one week, online in 2020 and 2021.

Case study element 1 – international inclusive teaching and learning in a module

In a module (and the programme as a whole), student access to digital technology resources is fundamentally important. If students cannot access the resources, then they cannot be included and cannot undertake study needs. Technological functions required by learners are made accessible for mobile as well as desktop access, and online support at departmental and institutional level is provided on request if students encounter difficulties (a factor considered in more detail in [ref. Papathoma et al. chapter](#)). Time differences and any country restrictions to specific synchronous software are accommodated where possible - some online synchronous sessions may be re-run, or recordings with captions made available with follow-on use of discussion forums for questions or comment. As this programme focuses on technology enhanced learning studies, learner digital technology competence is generally sound, but some students may not have experienced specific technologies used in the programme. Students can take advantage of online support (for example, via email request) and training (for example, online guides and videos) for the range of online functions and software used for the module. Students can access a wide range of software and download these from a University site, and the tutor's choice of technologies ensures that software is not introduced that some learners may not be able to access. If student issues are encountered, the tutor can request internal online support, both at departmental and institutional level.

Student levels of interest are generally high. Students are expected to engage with research activities that are relevant to their interests and professional experiences and needs; a tutor guides from a research perspective while students guide the focus of the topics for study. A tutor adopts pedagogic practices that support work at an appropriate level, which are discussed and made known before students are engaged in activities - such as summarizing a book chapter, critically reviewing a paper, or engaging in peer discussions on topics. Tutors share their pedagogic practices with the tutor team, which might involve discussing issues as well as successes (an important balance highlighted in [ref. Henderson et al. chapter](#)) perhaps involving uses of digital technologies in particular ways, such as offering synchronous video conferencing sessions prior to an assignment completion to support student engagement at a time when they might want to discuss some uncertainties.

A tutor's experience and competence develops over time. Tutors are involved in shared review and discussion, and students provide feedback regularly. A tutor is sensitive to different approaches that students might adopt, and is concerned with developing interpersonal relationship and communication at the same time as supporting cognitive engagement. Through online engagement via video conferencing sessions, and discussion forums and

emails, a tutor elicits ideas and interests of students, and may add key points or offer additional perspectives or research sources, helping to shape shared participation in positive ways. Topics that a tutor initially highlights may be of a quite generic nature (for example, questioning the roles of discussion and silence in networked learning communities), and students are encouraged to consider these within their own areas of interest, experience, contexts and professional practices. A tutor encourages students to enquire, to question and to have critical concern for the topics that are being explored, and within the study that they undertake – so ‘why’, ‘so what’ and ‘how’ questions are raised, whenever possible.

Emotional engagement is a crucial concern. Students are encouraged to support each other, through informal as well as formal channels (discussed further in [ref. Järvelä et al. chapter](#)), and time is taken in building sharing, discussion and communication within and across a cohort of students (perhaps asking students to share their experiences, and then to compare how or why these might be similar or different). A tutor takes time to respond to individual students (via email or in discussion forums), as well as to students within the cohort as a whole, focusing on developing trust and understanding (ensuring student voice is respected, and asking appropriately whether clarification is needed).

Social engagement is found to support emotional engagement. Student responses and comments are encouraged through discussion forums, chat facilities and email, and students may set up their own social media links to discuss beyond the formal virtual environment. In terms of psychological engagement, both a tutor and students seek to be sensitive to both posts and absence of posts. Different approaches, different ideas and different perspectives are encouraged, and discussed in an open and positive manner. Discussion seeks to find out, rather than being used to make assertions or statements. Through this practice, participatory engagement seeks to be developed. Learning activities provide for sharing and peer interaction wherever possible, and peer support is encouraged throughout - students are asked to comment, and to provide alternative ideas based on their contexts. As students come from different contexts and backgrounds, providing a variety of different activities enables practices aligned with more specific contexts and backgrounds; for example, some activities enable more individual work (individuals involved in summarizing) while others enable more participatory work (groups creating an overview presentation).

At a more administrative level, procedures are made known as early as possible, so that students are aware of expectations and can discuss any issues or challenges with a tutor (discussed also in [ref. Godsk chapter](#)). Above all, a tutor recognizes students as professionals with their own strength of background and experience; doctoral study is considered as a joint endeavour, a moulding of professional background and experience, with doctoral study experience.

Case study element 2 – international inclusive teaching and learning in a residential

A virtual learning environment provides a standard platform for all one-week online residential activities - all activities are organized in one place, accessible through one webpage. The environment is structured to accommodate mobile access with limited bandwidth, wherever possible. Activities are undertaken in a variety of ways, using synchronous video conferencing where possible, but with the possibility for students to access a recording afterwards. Captioning is provided for all recordings, and resources are checked for compliance with accessibility needs. Time differences between student locations and any country restrictions to specific synchronous software are recognized, discussed and accommodated where feasible. The timing of sessions is aligned to the time zones where the majority of students can access synchronous activities within a reasonable ‘working or waking day’. Students are provided with details about access to resources and activities at least one week in advance. If students find access is not possible or easy, they can make contact and seek departmental or institutional support.

Students are generally aware of the range of functionality that will be used prior to any activities being undertaken. Students may propose the use of technologies to support their activities or the activities of the wider cohort (for example, creating a shared group overview presentation in software other than that used by a tutor), but to support inclusive practices these technologies need to be agreeable and accessible to all students and to all tutors. University-provided software is accessible to students, which ranges from generic software such as word processing and spreadsheet packages, through to specific software, such as statistical programs.

In a residential, tutors offer a range of more general or overarching topics that can broaden the understanding and experience of students (such as sessions on research methodologies, study approaches, or examples of alumni student research). Overall, pedagogic applications are based on social constructivist principles, involving discussion and reflection wherever possible. An example is the provision in advance of a paper for reading, with questions also posted in advance that should be considered, while responses to these questions are discussed during a synchronous video conference, with the tutor taking points forward (offering additional details and research sources, for example), and then opening up further discussion either synchronously or via a discussion forum. A discussion forum opened beyond a synchronous session allows the tutor to monitor comments, and to respond to queries as appropriate (for example, suggesting an alternative perspective to consider, or another paper that provides a different balance of view).

The importance of social and behavioural engagement is recognized and is developed and accommodated where possible. Tutors engage with the entire cohort and with individuals, through email, discussion forums, and synchronous activities. Student voices and contributions are valued, carefully considered, and respectfully responded to.

Individual student areas of interest are respected and accepted. The role of the tutor in this respect is to share their study experience and expertise, and to foster critical concern to question assumptions and the underpinnings that may be taken-for-granted (suggesting to students that it could be worth considering another alternative, for example).

Emotional engagement, and particularly the need for reassurance, is a key factor of concern when interacting with students. Students may have professional experience and backgrounds that are very strong, but their involvement in high-level academic study is often an unknown and a concern to them. In this respect, emotional engagement is often critical to wider engagement and success. Support for emotional engagement is encouraged by tutors and by administrators; for example, giving positive responses when strong interest is shown, using emojis, and discussing issues sympathetically. Developing trust and understanding may require a tutor to reach out to some students more than to others, perhaps for some international students if they feel more isolated and more reluctant to share certain issues or challenges that they face. Being non-judgmental is particularly important in this respect; checking emails and messages to ensure that this is the case can mean the difference between isolating and engaging (for example, saying 'I wonder whether another way might be to...' rather than 'take this approach rather than the one you have used' to someone who has not responded a great deal up to that point). Additionally and importantly, the support of peers is encouraged through channels that tutors may not have access to.

Social engagement is developed over time. Initially, students are encouraged to share some of their background with others via a discussion forum. Opportunities to discuss via audio without having a video camera on are encouraged and accepted, but the longer-term goal is to encourage direct presentation and discussion with external academics and groups.

Empathy for diversity is an important given, both for students and tutors. Whilst diversity needs to be accommodated, and the features of diversity need to be known, there is also the need to accommodate inclusivity, where functionality can be applied to support those who would otherwise be excluded. The role of captioning for video recordings, for example, is important in this respect. However, as some students find captions distracting, functionality also needs

to be available so that this facility can be turned off; to offer a balance of options where possible is important. Ideas (technological and pedagogic) for participation are always considered, but within the possibilities of inclusive practice, particularly from an international perspective. In this respect, it can be the case that different forms of engagement behaviours in different activities can lead to some distress or even antagonism. For example, online 'lurking' (perhaps better termed online 'observing') can be regarded by those who post frequently as being a sign of not engaging or contributing. In those cases, a greater understanding between the individuals or groups is developed wherever possible, sometimes achieved by considering research outcomes in the published literature (discussing the literature on online 'lurkers', and how this is perceived by those who do not consider themselves to be 'lurkers', but 'active observers', for example).

Students are always regarded as professionals, coming with a background of professional experience and expertise. That professional expertise is greatly valued; the sharing of that expertise is encouraged, and that sharing has been found to support students in the past in a variety of ways (for example, through confidence building and through interests in sharing). A key aim of activities in a virtual residential is to develop expertise and perspectives in research study and to support social, emotional, psychological and behavioural engagement; a tutor is concerned, therefore, with sharing their expertise and experience with individuals with a student group that brings and shares their own expertise and experience.

Conclusions

In drawing conclusions from the previous detail and discussion in this chapter, it is perhaps worth considering how the framework (in Table 1) which was used to capture elements and factors that can influence international inclusive teaching and learning might be shaped into a more hierarchical framework from a developmental perspective. Whilst the discussion of taxonomy versus hierarchy is longstanding (Bloom, 1956), hierarchy can sometimes allow possible relationships between contributory elements to be considered and discussed. In other words, what might need to be in place initially for international inclusive teaching and learning to enable elements of the framework to build upon those previous elements, can be postulated.

In creating a possible hierarchy of elements, it should be recognized that this form of inductive development is subjective; it depends upon context, and indeed might be considered differently by other individuals. However, given this caveat, the following is offered and argued.

Overall, there are five separate elements that are clearly important, and each of the latter four elements would appear to have potential dependency on a previous element:

1. An international inclusive teaching and learning programme cannot happen without students. A programme, therefore, needs to engage student levels of interest, and if the programme is student-centred, then cognitive and intellectual engagement needs to come from students as much as from tutors (discussed also in [ref. Nørgård chapter](#)). In order to undertake a student-centred approach, concern for student self-regulation and self-motivation may be important in this respect (discussed further in [ref. Wong et al. chapter](#)). As Pintrich and De Groot (1990) stated in the conclusion of their seminal paper: "Student involvement in self-regulated learning is closely tied to students' efficacy beliefs about their capability to perform classroom tasks and to their beliefs that these classroom tasks are interesting and worth learning. At the same time, these motivational beliefs are not sufficient for successful academic performance; self-regulated learning components seem to be more directly implicated in performance" (p.38). How and when these elements of self-regulation and self-motivation are developed or might need to be supported within a programme may be a key concern to understand from an international student perspective.
2. International and inclusive teaching and learning practice needs to ensure student access via digital technology resources. Location and time differences need to be

accommodated, student digital technology competence needs to be known or supported, functionalities and specific forms of software and hardware used by a tutor need to be accessible to the student, and technical support needs to be available to both students and tutors (discussed also in [ref. Castañeda et al. chapter](#)). The importance of recognising and addressing these key limitations is clearly identified by, for example, Tulinayo et al. (2018). Ensuring access, inclusivity and diversity is likely to require an understanding from different international student perspectives, as well as an understanding of how technology functionalities apply to programme needs and may develop in the future.

3. Social engagement is critically important to ensure inclusivity and to develop understanding of diversity. Emotional engagement should be an element strongly considered and accommodated within social engagement, both between peers and between students and tutors. The relationship between tutors and students in determining engagement is clearly highlighted in an international context by Cinches et al. (2017). However, psychological engagement may need a more individual focus to ensure inclusivity of all those working internationally in different contexts and with cultural backgrounds, as the latter may determine different patterns of working and communication. Participatory engagement should be encouraged and supported, as it can lead to behavioural engagement that is student-centred across the range of learning and teaching activities.
4. Tutor practice and support should be based on principles that align with social engagement. It follows that pedagogic applications and tutor support should be aligned with social constructivist principles. Ashwin and McVitty (2015) identify a wide range of ways in which students can be engaged and enable their voice and involvement to be recognized and valued. In parallel, enabling teacher experience and competence to be developed, including interpersonal skills, should be in place to support inclusivity and diversity. Underpinning these elements, institutional and tutor features of valuing student experiences and expertise, of ways to support inclusivity and diversity, need to be in place.
5. The administrative level is fundamentally important in supporting all of the elements above. In a different context, Ahmad et al. (2019) identify ways that procedural and transactional engagement can support student-centred research in laboratory contexts. Both procedural and transactional engagement are needed, where procedures and administrative practices support student-centred directions, student-led approaches in collaboration with tutors, and understanding and accommodation of inclusivity and diversity at an international level.

Future directions

In terms of future directions for research in this field, there is clearly a need to explore how teaching and learning can accommodate more international-wide contexts. Whilst this chapter and many papers explore features and factors that relate to international inclusive teaching and learning from a Western-based perspective and context, this area of concern should also be considered from other perspectives and contexts beyond Europe, Australia and North America (supporting perspectives through a decolonized curriculum).

In terms of the five key elements that are identified in the section above, there is clearly a need for understanding in greater depth how these features apply and how they are being accommodated. For example, how online self-regulation and self-motivation are developed (and to what extents) in different contexts and regions of the world needs to be explored so that there is a greater understanding of how to handle the further development of this need within an online environment. Similarly, ways in which technologies can be developed and used to support greater inclusivity, but also greater choice of diversity functionality, is also required. Crucially, the ways that tutors and students work together to ensure the variety of forms of engagement, and ways that pedagogic practice can support this, should also be explored more. The very limited research on how administrative, procedural and transactional

engagement is developed to support international inclusive teaching and learning is also in need of expansion, as this can be a critically important factor (that can work both negatively as well as positively). Understanding these elements in greater detail will then enable practice to be advanced, through a greater sharing of examples and approaches.

Ultimately, the impact of this work can support both students and tutors, and, consequently, courses, programmes and institutions. Online study, including that at doctoral level, is in some respects in its infancy, but the recent worldwide events that have shifted educational practices to online engagement highlight not just the possibility that international inclusive teaching and learning can occur, but that it can enable education to continue when the boundaries of that possibility shift fundamentally.

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