# Supporting Students Toward Success

## Engagement Practices for Lasting Impact

*Kristen Beck, M.S.*
*Clare Brown, M.S.Ed.*

As online faculty, we are given a wonderful opportunity and simultaneous challenge to serve online students and to meet students where they are, with what they need. We have worked hard to become experts in our respective fields of practice and to strive to serve our students in their understanding of content and application in those areas. This level of expertise is vital to the academic environment and to the success of our students. Yet, much of our teaching occurs outside the scope of research, books, and papers. Particularly when it comes to engaging online learners, something more is required. As online faculty, we are called to engage our students in the larger discourse of online learning, not just the course they may be taking with us in a given term.

Petrea Redmond et al. (2018) shared that when considering engagement with online students we must "...think about elements and types of engagement that afford students opportunities to learn from and with others, and... think about the types of engagement that provide equitable and effective learning and teaching opportunities for all students."

In this way, when online content is curated for us, we have the ability to bring to our online courses our expertise and also our personal approach to the classroom. The curated content affords us space and time to make that content our own, in such a way that we can engage more meaningfully in personalization for our students.

Five elements emerge when reviewing recent research through which we can further consider faculty engagement and personalization in the online

classroom. These five elements include social, cognitive, behavioral, collaborative, and emotional engagement. Each element offers unique potential for us as faculty to bring our own experiences, interests, passions, and styles to the classroom, all the while affording us an opportunity for increased personal connections with our students, and enhanced relevancy and application of course concepts. (Redmond et al., 2018).

## Social Engagement

Through social engagement, faculty can help students to become life-long, self-directed learners. Building community, creating a sense of belonging, developing relationships, and establishing trust all fall into this area and are wrapped into our ability as faculty to connect authentically with our students.

## Notes from the Field

*Leverage weekly announcements to foster connections with your students. For a bigger impact, consider incorporating video announcements alongside more traditional ones within your course [i]. In addition to weekly content announcements, creating a weekly video helps establish personal presence. This also helps build rapport, allowing students to get to know you throughout the term, and encourages deeper student engagement.*

### Resources to Grow

- [Teaching in Higher Ed Podcast: Small Teaching Online with Flower Darby](#)

## Cognitive Engagement

Learning opportunities that offer time for critical thinking, self-reflection, and idea integration can help students to actively apply what they are learning. As was shared by Marcia Dixson (2010), "Instructors need to create active learning situations in which students can meaningfully apply

what they are learning... meaningful communication helps students to feel engaged with the courses they are taking despite the lack of physical presence of the instructor or other students"(9).

**Notes from the Field**

*Use grading feedback and discussion responses to "cultivate curiosity" in your students. Ask probing questions. Ask students to approach material from a new or challenging perspective. Offer supplemental resources within grading feedback and discussion responses to spark further learning.*

**Resources to Grow**

- [Ramsey Musallam: 3 Rules to Spark Learning TED Talk](#) **[ii]**

**Behavioral Engagement**

According to Phyllis Blumberg (2017), faculty can impact powerful change for students by helping them to develop agency along with their academic skills. As shared, the "instructor provides increasing opportunities for students to assume responsibility for their own learning, leading to achievement of stated learning objectives" (127).

As faculty we have the ability to impact the lives of our students beyond the scope of the classroom, by helping students to understand how they learn best, as well as ways to apply those preferences for maximum success.

**Notes from the Field**

*Reach out to students with individualized emails. Help students to cultivate a growth mindset by encouraging them to persevere in the face of setbacks, referring them to appropriate campus resources as necessary. Encourage students to reach and grow by providing links to additional resources.*

**Resources to Grow**

- [Carol Dweck : The Power of Believing That You Can Improve TED Talk](#) **[ii]**

- [Angela Lee Duckworth: Grit TED Talk](#) [ii]

## Collaborative Engagement

Research continues to support that students need to feel connected not only to the content that they are presented within the classroom, but also to their instructors and peers (Dixson, 2010). Through the development of personal connections to faculty and peers, as well as a professional network and institutional connections, students feel that they are a part of a larger community which supports them and to which they are accountable for success.

### Notes from the Field

*Actively participate in the weekly discussions, highlighting students' ideas within the context of the classroom community and making connections between students' posts. Encourage students to actively participate in learning communities and engage with support teams.*

### Resources to Grow

- [Anindya Kundu: The Boost Students Need to Overcome Obstacles TED Talk](#)

## Emotional Engagement

More than ever, finding ways to connect over a shared commitment to learning, while working to support students in their expectations of the learning experience is vital to their success in our respective courses and on the journey toward their degrees. Students' attitudes and emotions, joys, struggles, accomplishments, and concerns need space to be addressed with faculty authentically. Our students want to know that we are more than the computer screens they stare at for their studies. They love to put human faces, voices, and personalities behind the comments, feedback, and support offered.

Dixson (2010) asserts that, "Clearly the path to student engagement...is not about the type of activity/assignment but about multiple ways of creating meaningful communication between students and with their instructor – it's all about connections" (8).

**Notes from the Field**

*Provide individual outreach, acknowledging when a student has done well and offering encouragement when a student has fallen behind. Consider incorporating audio feedback, in addition to feedback throughout the rubric, offering positive reinforcement and pointing out where a student has done particularly well* **[ii]**. *If a student appears to be struggling, reach out and ask how you can help. Collaborate with advisors to provide multi-faceted support.*

**Resources to Grow**

- [Michelle Stowe: Empathy - The Heart of Difficult Conversations TED Talk](#) **[ii]**
- [Rita Pierson: Every Kid Needs a Champion TED Talk](#) **[ii]**

**Wrap Up**

We don't always know the immediate impact our efforts will have on our students. But, there continues to be strong evidence that bringing our personalities and interests, emotional connections, and dedication into the classroom, and sharing those authentically with students, we can make stronger, lasting connections.

Those links will not only trigger new learning of academic content but they will also support student engagement and personal growth along the journey toward their degrees. By purposefully using the time and energy afforded by curated content, faculty have the power to fill those spaces with impactful, personal, and professional connections to last a lifetime for their students.

# References

Blumberg, P. (2017). Practical tools to help faculty use learner-centered approaches. To Improve the Academy, 27(1),111-134. doi:10.1002/j.2334-4822.2009.tb00551

Dixson, M. D. (2010). Creating Effective Student Engagement in Online Courses: What Do Students Find Engaging? *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, *10*(2), 1–13. Retrieved from [https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ890707&site=eds-live&scope=site](https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.snhu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ890707&site=eds-live&scope=site)

Redmond, P., Heffernan, A., Abawi, L., Brown, A., & Henderson, R. (2018). An online engagement framework for higher education. Online Learning, 22(1), 183-204. doi:10.24059/olj.v22i1.1175

[i] ***Accessibility Note:*** *As a best practice, faculty should ensure that all video and audio content added to a course has accurate captions and/or transcripts. Please see COLT's* [Accessibility Considerations](#) *page for more information.*

[ii] *This resource is presented in the context of K-12 education but the overall concepts are also relevant to adult learners.*