


Chapter 4

Opportunity in Partnering: Cross–Sector Collaboration for Student Engagement

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ABSTRACT

This chapter delineates the multi-faceted approaches to student engagement based on the research and praxis of four authors. Within action research and appreciative inquiry in local and international contexts, the authors had collected and analyzed the praxes of international colleagues, resulting in the Metagogy Theorem. This theorem guides critical reflection on and selection of strategies, methods, and techniques to implement in higher education program design and development. With a focus on cross-sector program development, professional development, and multi-stakeholder engagement in student supports, the authors pose questions and suggest practices gleaned from their international and inter-cultural collaborations.

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INTRODUCTION

The Concerns and their Intersectionality

In 2019, the global SARS-CoV 2 pandemic caught education institutions and faculty rather unprepared. The sudden mandated school building closures caught teachers ill-equipped to adjust instructional content and methods to remote learning. Pushed into the role of instructional designers for online learning, teachers found themselves simply adjusting and prioritizing topics of existing curricula, providing but at a minimum of fundamental content. Without the benefit of their customary in-person instructional methods, content, and time, instructors' teaching processes were further hampered by inconsistent access to technology and by a lack of familiarity with new learning platforms for students and teachers.

This lack of equipment, training, experience, and the varying levels of sophistication in designing and facilitating an engaging online learning environment resulted in learning loss for students in pre-K through secondary education and for those entering higher education programs in the post-pandemic era as well. Bryant's research (2024) confirmed that this situation led to significant gaps in knowledge and skills, largely due to the frequent shifts between in-person and remote learning, inconsistent access to technology for all stakeholders, and difficulties with online learning platform acquisition.

As important for students' academic success in their pathways is their social development and mental health, which was significantly impacted by the changed learning setting. The lack of in-person interactions left students with few opportunities for building communication skills or solving conflicts within the guidance of mentors and peers (Elmer et al., 2020; Babb et al., 2022). In light of deficits in some of these social skills, self-efficacy and empathy development was hindered. Without the typical social interactions among peers and staff within a school community, many students struggled to gain emotional awareness skills to develop an overall sense of well-being (Wiggins & Payton, 2023). Moreover, many of the so-termed *non-traditional* students, along with those from disenfranchised communities, as well as students with special learning needs, were faced with additional challenges. For them, fewer instructional resources and support services were accessible in an online schooling environment which clearly hampered both teacher and student fully engaging in a fruitful teaching/learning relationship.

As institutions scurried to find remedies to these unexpected and sudden changes and different needs, barriers -- if not chaos -- ensued as educators sought to respond without adequate preparation time and resources. While research provided evidence of these challenges, changes, and impact on students, such as the reduced social interaction and increased anxiety, it also surfaced that some learners were

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