



#52etc – a toolkit for student engagement

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1. Pre-game: student success

Stuart Norton, Advance HE

The issues impacting on student success are broad and complex. Since 2015 Advance HE (previously Higher Education Academy) has provided frameworks to support the higher education (HE) sector in enabling student success (Advance HE, 2020). The framework series was developed to enable a shared point of reference and common language to discuss, shape and review policy, process and practice. The six thematic areas focus on key strategic priorities that all underpin teaching excellence and the aspiration to support student success in its broadest sense:

- + Transforming assessment in HE: to maximise student learning from both the process and products of assessment within academic, discipline and professional communities
- + Embedding employability in HE: to enable successful transitions and contributions for students throughout HE and beyond; benefiting them, their communities and the economy
- + Student access, retention, attainment and progression in HE: to foster a culture that promotes and enables the full and equitable participation of all students to, through and beyond HE
- + Student engagement through partnership: to commit to developing open, constructive and continuous dialogue between students and staff, among students, and between institutions and their students' unions, associations or guilds
- + Internationalising higher education: to prepare graduates to live in and contribute responsibly to a globally interconnected society
- + Flexible learning in HE: to offer choice in how, what, when and where students learn through flexibility in the pace, place and mode of delivery.

1.1 The toolkit

The 52 Engaging Toolkit Cards (52etc) is a new addition to the wide range of resources that support the frameworks. With a particular focus on student engagement and flexibility in learning, the toolkit provides a high-impact, low technology practical resource that is specifically directed to enhance student engagement. While student engagement has always been a focus point for HE institutions, the current context of the Covid-19 global pandemic has seen a surge in flexible delivery methods. At a time when student engagement is more important than ever, 52etc has been designed for any taught environment, whether that be face to face, online or blended.

Research shows that students engage better through active learning (Healey and Healey, 2019). Ensuring the active involvement of students in the learning process is critical. But how can we ensure that engagement with content remains ‘optimal’? While there are many different constructs surrounding student engagement (for example, see Bryson, 2014; Buckley, 2014; Chapman, 2003; Gibbs, 2010; Healey, Flint and Harrington, 2014; Smith, 2014; Healey and Healey, 2019), it is recognised that students are responsible for constructing their own knowledge and that learning is also dependent on the environment that enables student engagement (Kuh, 2001). Given this context, the toolkit is specifically designed to maximise involvement with study, providing a variety of means to enhance student motivation and engagement, using key pedagogic principles underpinning learning and teaching (Evans et al, 2015).

1.2 Approach

While the approaches in the cards are purposefully generic, it is important for practitioners to consider their use in the context of subject disciplines and the affordances of each student’s learning environment. What 52etc offers is a means of strengthening the interaction with knowledge by providing a range of tasks and ideas that promote student engagement, enabling students to interact, ask questions and contribute through group activities. Keeping students engaged virtually comes with additional challenges. For example, student behaviours that would be obvious in a physical classroom environment, prompting facilitators to repeat points or vary pace, will be less obvious in the online context. Designed with such challenges in mind, the cards encourage engagement and support students to develop deeper understanding of the subject matter through a variety of means; enabling a greater reflection of their own learning and often providing an opportunity to promote dialogue beyond the classroom space.

By adopting a range of different approaches the cards provide a variety of useful tools available for you to adopt and encourage meaningful interactions among your classes. We urge you to invest the time to explore, expand and adapt the various methods suggested to make learning, whether online, face to face or a hybrid approach, more engaging and accessible to all.

Further, we encourage and anticipate practitioners’ critical engagement with the cards, offering them for adaptation, repurposing and selective use to suit their students’ needs. To this end the two jokers in each pack are left intentionally blank, in the hope that practitioners will contribute their own suggestions (based on disciplines, delivery method or particular thematic application of the cards), sending these back to the authors and/or sharing them via social media (hashtag ‘#52etc’). In this way they will form the basis of a curated collection of evidence-informed learning artefacts and a sustainable shared resource for application within the sector.

2. The game: #52etc

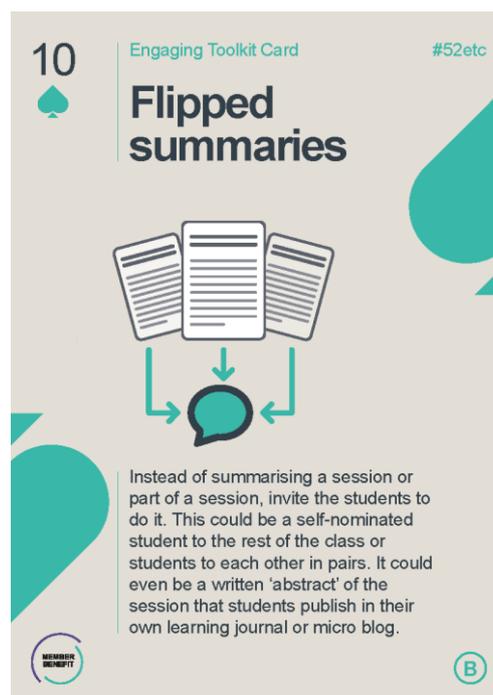
Ian Turner, University of Derby

Student engagement is a complex, multi-faceted concept that involves the holistic experience of being a student at university. The #52etc resource focuses specifically on pedagogic approaches that can be used in teaching sessions to foster student engagement. At a practical level, the cards offer innovative examples for structured engagement to allow students to successfully achieve higher order thinking skills, take ownership and engage with their own learning.

Some of the #52etc ideas originate with a specific author (such as the updated examples based upon work produced by Turner (2015)) while others are drawn from established practice across HE and FE: ideas adapted from those seen and experienced as well as some original ideas and approaches. Most offer new techniques or strategies drawn from practice and developed around notions of engagement, flexibility and pedagogic principles. All have been piloted and refined through practice, direct feedback from student cohorts, and adoption in our own pedagogic practice and facilitation. It is important to note that none of these approaches work on their own and they need to be incorporated into a teaching plan.

2.1 Card spotlight

Let's look at one of the cards in detail as an example of how it can be used to increase student engagement.



‘Flipped summaries’ breaks the traditional orthodoxy of an academic summarising a teaching session and instead passes this task to the students. The card suggests this summary could be delivered by a self-nominated student or even by pairs of students. In this simple sentence there is a wide range of possibilities and approaches of how this can be implemented. It could be that students complete this summary on a rotation, or that all students complete the summary. These summaries could be in any format, from an abstract to an infographic or collated in collaborative format such as Padlet or a microblog. This could not only be used to create a record of student’s perceptions of the session but as a useful formative aid. It could be that you complete a ‘flip flipped’ summary in which you summarise the teaching session from the summaries provided by the students. This could act as a valuable reflective tool by asking students to record what they have gained from a session and comparing their replies to the intended learning outcomes. The purpose of this narrative is to show that the approach on the card has a wide range of possibilities in how it can be adapted and implemented into individual teaching sessions.

Let's look at another example, ‘the use of artefacts and objects’.



This approach could be used as a tool for students to share their experiences with the class or in small groups. It can also be of value in professional courses, such as when students return from a placement, to act as focus point and assist students in grounding their learning. What an artefact is chosen to represent can come from a wide range of options from subject-specific concepts, personal feelings or the viewpoint of a character in a case study. This approach, like many of the others, could be used on a very small scale such as an ice breaker activity at the start of the session, or it could be a whole session in itself depending on the context and intended learning outcomes. The artefact display could be reframed as a competition where students’ choices are evaluated and voted by their peers.

It could even be that the collective artefacts are constructed into narrative by you to summarise the group's feelings on the topics or sessions.

The cards should not be thought of in isolation; many if not all of them could be used in combination to create a different way of engaging your students. For example, 'thought for the day' could be used to set the context for 'jigsaw groups' or a 'tabletop exercise'. Likewise, 'challenging questions' could be combined with a 'poll' which in turn be used to create a 'blog, vlog or podcast'. The idea is that each of the ideas acts as a catalyst for how they can be adapted to your individual situation.

2.2 Use

How you use the cards is up to you! As an individual you could simply look through the cards and try to identify any approaches or ideas to incorporate into your own teaching. However, we urge that if you come across a card that does not resonate with you, that you pause. Think about what aspect of the card's approach makes it unsuitable in your teaching. Could minor adjustments or adaptations allow you to come up with an idea that suits? For example, perhaps the 'polls' card does not appeal as setting it up and monitoring the outcomes in a session is difficult. One of many adaptations could be making a selected student a moderator for the session and allowing them to administer the polls and feed the outcome back to you at pre-arranged points in the session.

If you are using these cards as part of a group session, perhaps to stimulate new ways to approach teaching, you could simply use the cards as a discussion tool. Below are a series of questions that may be useful in framing the conversation.

- + Which card most resonates with you and why?
- + Which card(s) have you used in your teaching practice and how did it go?
- + Which cards do you not feel you could use in your teaching practice and why?
- + How could you adapt [a selected card] to improve it / incorporate it in your teaching practice?
- + What other approaches do you use for enhancing student engagement?

As a group you could try something a bit more creative such as creating sequences. In sequences the idea is to take two, three or more cards and put them together. The purpose is to try to create a new unique activity that connects (or is stimulated by) those in the sequence. You could use any of these activities as a catalyst for creating brand new ideas. Try asking people to create their own cards based on existing practice or ideas generated from reviewing the existing cards; we would welcome you sharing these back to the wider community.

3. More than a game: engaging all students by considering inclusion and equity of learning experiences

Jess Moody, Advance HE

It is always an honour and a delight to hear educators share their ideas, innovations and reflections on ways to engage their students. The diversity of teaching experiences in our sector – in discipline, delivery, staff identity and experience, pedagogical theory and praxis, and resource – offers a wealth of opportunities to share different ways of working with, and for, our diverse learners.

I say 'diverse' learners, for the question is never only 'how to engage your students' but 'how to engage all your students'.

We know that HE systems can both replicate and compound existing social and educational inequalities, whether that be in issues of access, retention and outcomes (eg Advance HE 2019, Codioli McMaster, 2019; UUK and NUS, 2018; Williams et al, 2019), or in experience (eg Neves and Hewitt, 2020; Pitkin, 2020; Stonewall UK, 2018). The reasons for these inequalities are complex, but it is right that 'teaching and learning' – in its widest sense of delivery, curricula, assessment, support – takes time (where possible) to reflect on its roles in perpetuating or challenging such inequalities (Moody, 2020).

3.1 The reflective practitioner

The 52etc pack provides such an opportunity. We take the view that inclusive practice done well does not stymie creativity or innovation, but rather ensures that such innovation takes inclusion at the point of design and delivery so that all may benefit. This may require from individual educators – as well as disciplines – a continuous practice of reflection and discourse: on positionality, privileges, assumptions, and understandings of the diverse needs and identities of your current and future students.

Here we have 50 ideas for ways of teaching, and two 'jokers'. As an educator, you can take a card and ask yourself questions such as:

- + What **accessibility support may I need to anticipate** to make sure all students (and teachers) can participate in this activity? Consider, for example, formatting of resources; digital equity; alternative formats readily available or embedded.
- + How can I **ensure instructions and communications are clear**? Consider, for example, contextualising new phrases or idioms; explaining and preparing students for new ways of working.

- + Which students might this activity **privilege** (even unintentionally), and which students might **face barriers** to engagement? Why? How might I mitigate the imbalance?
- + For group activities and discussion, how can I provide guidance and set **expectations on inclusive and respectful conversation** or debate? How can I **model** this in my own engagement and contributions?

If you can, discuss these questions with a mentor, with a peer, with your students. In collating this pack we certainly had some constructive discussions: raising perspectives or interpretations each other had missed; sharing experience of what works for whom and when; and considering the role of commonalities, difference and ‘play’ in difficult times.

Making space to engage a diverse range of students and teaching peers in these reflections is itself a valuable learning experience around ‘inclusivity’ (see, for example, Mercer-Mapstone et al, 2019; UCL, 2020). Staff and students we work with often talk of their relief at being granted ‘permission’ and ‘space’ to start such conversations.

3.2 What is ‘engagement’?

Question as well, your own norms of learner ‘engagement’. Too often during the Covid-19 pandemic discourses around student ‘engagement’ were simplistic and normative to the ‘traditional’ (not excluded) student: a focus on presenteeism, visibility, metrics, group interaction, the ‘screen on, eyes up’ norm. Yet engagement may involve different behaviours or responses (embodied, social, technological, affective) from different groups (eg NDCS, 2020; West, 2020; Swauger, 2020). The ‘timeliness’ of engagement (whether in class activity, or where pre-work or reflection is required) will also – even more so during the pandemic – affect certain groups disproportionately (Bennett and Burke, 2018).

With each card, consider the range of possible presentations and preferences of engagement ‘behaviours’ from your students. For example, consider:

- + disabled students
 - + neurodiverse students
 - + students for whom the classroom language is an additional language
 - + students who work and/or have caring responsibilities, or otherwise hold commitments affecting time and engagement.
 - + students who are first in family to study in HE
 - + mature learners
 - + students from a group or groups underrepresented or marginalised in HE as a whole, or the institution, location, discipline, or level of study (for example, in relation to ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation)
-

- + students who are experiencing isolation (or a lack of ‘belonging’) related to the norms and behaviours of their institution, discipline, or their peers (Strayhorn, 2012; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Hinchcliffe, 2020).

How might you plan for, understand, and value the diversity of ‘engagement’ behaviours and impacts as you try new approaches in your teaching?

3.3 Curriculum, innovation and Covid: in search of grounding principles

The online ‘pivot’ for many (not all) educators in 2020 has forced the sector to address all these questions with more urgency as we ‘engage’ in different ways and in new and challenging circumstances: health risks, political and social upheaval, and the prevalence of the digital divide (OfS, 2020; Baughan et al, 2020) We try our best in the circumstances before us. We may make mistakes; we must learn.

However, in the focus on delivery we must not forget questions relating to engagement with the material and curriculum, and how that may be experienced differently by diverse students (or to put it another way, how it may be replicating historical exclusions of thought, scholarship and experience). Engagement with what the curriculum is and who the curriculum values is still vital. These 52etc ‘methods’ and practices must sit alongside deeper, wider conversations about what inclusive education can be. ‘Inclusive teaching and learning’ remains an ever evolving and nebulous term (Stentiford and Koutsouris, 2019) but may involve looking through your curriculum design, delivery, assessment and pedagogy to understand equity of student ‘engagement’ in new ways.

The theories, practices, values and aims here may vary among educators and their learner communities, but consider ‘engagement’ in relation to (for example): interculturalism and internationalism (Ippolito, 2007; Leask, 2008; Tran and Gomes, 2017), decolonisation and indigenisation (Bhambra et al, 2018; Pidgeon, 2016; Rollock et al, 2018); anti-racism (King and Changer, 2018; Ono-George, 2019), LGBTQ+ inclusion (Ward-Gale, 2016), or social justice and universal design for learning (Hanesworth et al, 2017).

As a very first step in engaging with inclusive pedagogy with respect to 52etc, it may help to centre your approach and activities through a set of principles, or ‘ways of working’. You may also choose to share these with your students as a guide for their own peer interactions (or simply to hold yourself accountable). You may need to adapt these to different teaching environments – online, blended, classroom, lab, studio etc.

A set of shared principles to underpin inclusive and supportive engagement can be a useful ‘sense-check’ for innovation.

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The examples below may inspire your own principles: think about how to set expectations for what you want your learning environment to look and feel like:

- + respect the diversity of experiences and identities in the room
- + pay attention to each other, welcome feedback and think about the impact of what we say
- + reflect on our own learning, connections to the material, and how our ideas and opinions are formed
- + consider the needs of others in terms of access to materials and discussions
- + stay curious.

For those 52etc cards that specifically encourage group or peer interaction you may also want to prepare your learners with expectations and standards in relation to safeguarding and respectful enquiry (these could include keeping language polite, critiquing arguments not people, respecting personal pronouns, actively inviting contributions from all, and actively challenging stereotypes). Ensure you model these behaviours yourself. This helps to ensure engagements are rich, challenging and keep students safe and active participants.

3.4 Is it working?

Ensuring feedback loops and partnership working with students on their learning, as well as their own sense of belonging and engagement in that learning, will help to navigate these difficult times, and hopefully build educators' confidence in trialling new ways of teaching. Make sure, though, to consider the challenges here relating to creation of safe discussion (above) and, when working in partnership with students, the challenges of power relations, and equitable partnerships (Matthews et al, 2019).

But the work must start somewhere.

Pick a card. Play it. Put it aside. Re-write it. Combine it. The tools are here: the choices and the learning are all yours.

4. About the authors

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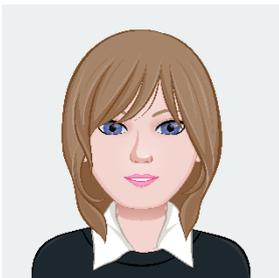
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