

0574

Engaging with engagement in an ICT context

Colin Rogers

Lancaster University, Lancaster, United Kingdom

Background

Reviews of research into the educational use of ICT have regularly concluded that there are benefits in terms of increased student engagement. The evidence basis for these claims is varied with engagement being defined in a variety of ways so as to capture elements of student behaviour, interest, motivation, sense of self and much more. Given this variety of definition it is perhaps likely that the evidence base for the claims of positive engagement effects will be equally varied. This paper forms the opening part of a symposium concerned with an exploration of the nature of the claims concerning the benefits of ICT use for the development of student engagement in school and college settings

Research Questions

The paper will undertake an examination of the range of uses of the term "engagement" to be found in the literature involving ICT use. It will explore the degree to which there is any significant commonality in the definitions offered and, indeed the extent to which definitions are often left at a largely implicit level. Two important subsidiary questions will be addressed. First, are the definitions offered in any way adequate to support the making of meaningful claims? Second, where clearer definitions are offered, in what ways do these impact upon the conclusions that are drawn?

Methods

The paper will draw upon a range of existing literature. This will fall into two prime clusters, that which attempts to offer evidence for the magnitude and direction of the impact of ICT upon engagement, and that which seeks to explore the nature of the construct of engagement itself. The former, given the voluminous size of the literature, will rely upon a number of reviews of the literature, for example (Condie, Mumro, with Seagreaves, & Kenesson, 2007) together with some selected instances of some of the more significant projects to date (Harrison, et al., 2002; Passey, Rogers, with Machell, & McHugh, 2004). The latter will cover work that is relatively atheoretical presenting impact on engagement as a relatively straightforward matter of direct observation through to work that has made a more explicit attempt to problematise the construct (e.g. Jary & Lebeau, 2009; Kuh, 2009). It will also draw upon the developments of theory in relation to the construct of motivation that has yet to see much in the way of direct application in the research into the impact of ICT. Exceptions to this would include work by presenters in this proposed symposium (Cox, 1997; Passey, et al., 2004). This work will be used to develop a new framework for the understanding of the nature of engagement when students are working with ICT. The relationship between "engagement" and the potentially broader term of "motivation" will be considered.

Frame

The analytical framework will be driven by a combination of empirical work, some of which has in itself often been atheoretical in nature, and theoretical work that focuses upon the development of an understanding of motivational processes where engagement is an important part. A prime concern will be to assess the degree to which "engagement" can be adequately defined and utilised in largely behavioural terms (time on task, task completion etc) or alternatively within a framework that requires a clearer consideration of less readily observed phenomena to do with the values and intentions held by the "engaged" individual. Jary and Lebeau (2009) for example discuss the importance of noting the socio-cultural context within which engagement is displayed and note the possibly unavoidable inclusion of institutional aims and objectives in considerations of student engagement.

Research findings

This paper essentially seeks to set the scene for others within the symposium. Its main contribution will be an analysis of the limited conceptualisations of the term "engagement" that have been used in research with ICT and the development of a more comprehensive analytical framework that will enable a more effective appraisal of existing research to be undertaken together with the illumination of further future research possibilities. The framework will seek to draw distinctions between facets of an over-arching construct of engagement. The following are offered as examples of the key distinctions that will be argued for.

Individual vs. contextual: Can engagement be best conceptualised as a function of the individual (some individuals can engage - others can't) or do we need to consider engagement as the outcome of complex interactions between the individual and their current context.

Short-term vs. long-term: Is engagement considered to be something demonstrated in the immediate activity or is it better considered as a set of more enduring qualities of an individual that may interact with varying contexts?

In each case above the alternative approaches to a definition of the nature of engagement carry with them different expectations regarding the contribution that ICT may be able to make in relation to their development and support. A clarification of these expectations will be the principle objective of this paper.

References

Condie, R., Mumro, B., with Seagreaves, L., & Kenesson, S. (2007). *The impact of ICT in Schools - a landscape review*. Coventry: Becta.

Cox, M. (1997). *The Effects of Information Technology on Students' Motivation*. Coventry: NCET.

Harrison, C., Comber, C., Fisher, T., Haw, K., Lewin, C., Lunzer, E., et al. (2002). *ImpaCT2. ICT in Schools Research and Evaluation Series - No. 7. The Impact of Information and Communication Technologies on Pupil Learning and Attainment*, from www.becta.org.uk/research/impact2

Jary, D., & Lebeau, Y. (2009). The student experience and subject engagement in UK sociology: a proposed typology. *British journal of sociology of education*, 30(6), 697-712. doi: 10.1080/01425690903235219

Kuh, G. D. (2009). What Student Affairs Professionals Need to Know About Student Engagement. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(6), 683-706.

Passey, D., Rogers, C. G., with Machell, J., & McHugh, G. (2004). *The Motivational Effect of ICT on Pupils* (pp. 77). London: DfES.