

**Promoting student engagement during online teaching - Exchanging experiences and implications
for teaching after the pandemic**

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Abstract

During the pandemic, we have gained experience with new formats, including synchronous online teaching. A fundamental challenge is a rather passive attitude of students during these classes. Research has shown that student engagement is a salient factor for learning success. We seek to emphasize the need for supporting student engagement and provide examples of methods that can be applied. There is evidence that such methods can encourage students, however, students have been showing an emergent tendency towards online fatigue. At the end of our classroom activity, we would like to discuss the “New Normal” of teaching after the pandemic in combinations of traditional and emerging formats.

Keywords: student engagement, synchronous online teaching, activating learning methods

Introduction

Whereas before the pandemic traditional teaching formats such as on-campus lectures dominated, the circumstances of the pandemic forced us to switch to new teaching formats (see Appendix A for an overview of different formats). Synchronous online teaching gained in importance. However, new teaching formats also require the rethinking of didactic concepts and methods that fit the framework conditions of the respective format.

Apart from benefits of online settings that should not be denied, the nature of an online setting involves fundamental challenges, such as e. g. reduced attention and focus of students on the class, lack of personal contact between lecturer and students as well as fellow students during the class, difficult interactive communication conditions, etc. This can lead to a much more passive stance and behaviour of students during class.

Research findings show that learning success requires student engagement (see Theoretical Foundation below). The methods for increasing student engagement depend on the teaching format, i.e. synchronous classroom setting, online format or asynchronous self-study sessions.

Our contribution focuses mainly on synchronous online formats.

In our classroom activity we are going to address the question of how student engagement can be encouraged in synchronous online settings, firstly when starting a session (also after a break) and secondly when utilizing cooperative learning activities during the session.

We would like to share our experiences and lessons learned in synchronous online teaching during the past two years (see also Sachsenmaier & Wengler, 2021). This includes the presentation of methods for student engagement, but also the limitations of synchronous online settings. In addition, we seek for an exchange of experiences and a discussion with the participants to develop an outlook for teaching after the pandemic.

Finally, we propose that effective student engagement needs additional learning formats, such as combinations of synchronous and asynchronous settings that also include on-campus settings to reduce or escape from increasingly emerging online fatigue.

We are going to facilitate in our classroom activity methods we used in online classes but the methods might be used in any teaching setting if each student has a mobile device. In the first part warm-up methods will be applied, thus the participants are going to get to know each other as well as experience these methods themselves. In the second part we are going to use methods that support knowledge exchange as well as discussions, thus the participants can share their experiences during the pandemic. The result of this exchange should be a collection of further activating methods they used or would like to use in the near future. In the final part we are going to discuss the question of “how the new normal for lectures might look like after the pandemic” .

The presented methods will be selected based on our experiences during the pandemic in synchronous online classes for management and business information students. These methods are not restricted to online classes and might also be transferred to other teaching formats as well as study programmes.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications.

An active learning process, learning in groups, and subject-related interaction with teachers and fellow students are conducive to academic success (Müller & Braun, 2018). Researchers have found out that there is a positive correlation between student engagement and student performance and satisfaction (Webber et al., 2013) as well as successful graduation (Flynn, 2014). Student engagement can be influenced by the university (Kuh, 2003) and is increasingly seen as an indicator of successful teaching (Groccia, 2018).

Schmidt and Mindt (2020) define student engagement as a multidimensional construct:

- Behaviour (e.g. preparation, active participation, absence),

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- Academic emotions (feelings about the institution and about the learning process, e.g. satisfaction, sense of belonging, frustration or anxiety),
- Cognitive activation (intense engagement with the course content).

In addition, Schmidt and Mindt (2020) note that teachers should be guided by these four supporting factors to promote student engagement: active and cooperative learning, supportive environment, experience of competence, and academic challenge.

Thus, Schmidt and Mindt (2020) argue that teaching in the form of pure front-of-class lectures is not effective, nor efficient. It can be assumed that it is more conducive to provide knowledge to students in a way that they can acquire and develop the material (e.g. record sessions for later viewing on demand). The learning process should then be supported and guided by the instructor, e.g. using the inverted classroom model (ICM) (Roemer & Hagemus-Becker, 2018). For online teaching formats it is therefore mandatory to encourage student engagement in order to facilitate students' learning success.

Our classroom activity seeks to contribute to effective teaching and learning by providing methods for increasing student engagement in synchronous online lectures. The focus of our contribution is firstly on the starting phase of a synchronous online teaching sessions and secondly on the cooperative learning activities to catalyze student engagement.

In the discussion phase at the end of our session we aim to add to the understanding of how future teaching formats can benefit from lessons learned during the pandemic. Rather than using online learning alone or face-to-face classes, complementary learning approaches including inverted classroom elements may contribute considerably to student engagement (McGuinness & Fulton, 2019).

Learning Objectives

- Awareness of the relevance of student engagement in teaching, independent from the teaching format
- Getting to know and apply different methods for increasing student engagement in synchronous online settings
- Be aware of the relevance of engagement in the starting phase of a class and the collaboration of fellow students
- Benefit from experiences and best practice that might be transferred to appropriate teaching formats
- Benefit from a discussion about the “new normal” teaching formats and methods after the pandemic

Classroom Activity Overview

Materials:

We are going to use an infinite canvas (e.g. [conceptboard](#)) to share and collect ideas as well as results. The participants are able to add, edit as well as save findings.

This classroom activity can be offered online using an web conference system with breakout rooms or on premise if the participants in the class room have a computer or tablet to edit the infinite canvas or as a hybrid session if some participants are only available online.

Class Size: 16-25 participants

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Outline for a 90min session:

Description	Methods	Involvement	Timeline
Introduction Experiencing methods that can be used during a warm-up	Ice breaker Where are you?	Get to know the infinite canvas: The participants are going to add a sticky note with their name and affiliation and mark their location on a world map.	20min
	Popcorn chat	Where would you be now if you had not attended the conference MOBTS?	
	Bingo	The participants are asked to write down words in a 3x3 grid that they associate with student engagement. If during the whole session someone uses one of the words, they can mark this word and if all words in a row/column have been marked they are going to call “Bingo” and win the game.	
	Anyone who...	Everyone switches their camera on and covers it somehow (e.g. a piece of paper). We are going to ask some questions that are connected to the topic or the participants, e.g. anyone who is a lecturer..., anyone who has experience in online teaching..., anyone who thinks that student engagement is worth to be activated If the participant would like to answer the question with yes, s/he opens the camera. The next question can be asked by e.g. the person how has opened the camera last.	
Exchange	Lecture	The authors are going to define student engagement and some findings based on their experience.	5min
	Think-Pair-Share (Milling)	The participants are grouped in breakout sessions and will exchange their experience in student engagement as well as collect activating methods on the canvas.	15min
	Stamping / Voting	The participants are going to wonder around on the canvas and mark the methods with different colours corresponding to they like to get to know more about this method or they	10min

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	Presentation	<p>have used this method themselves or they like to use this method in the near future.</p> <p>The methods that have been stamped most are presented by the person who has suggested it.</p>	10min
Discussion	Cooking recipe	How will the new normal in teaching be after the pandemic?	20min
Wrap-Up		Summary of the findings	10min

Literature

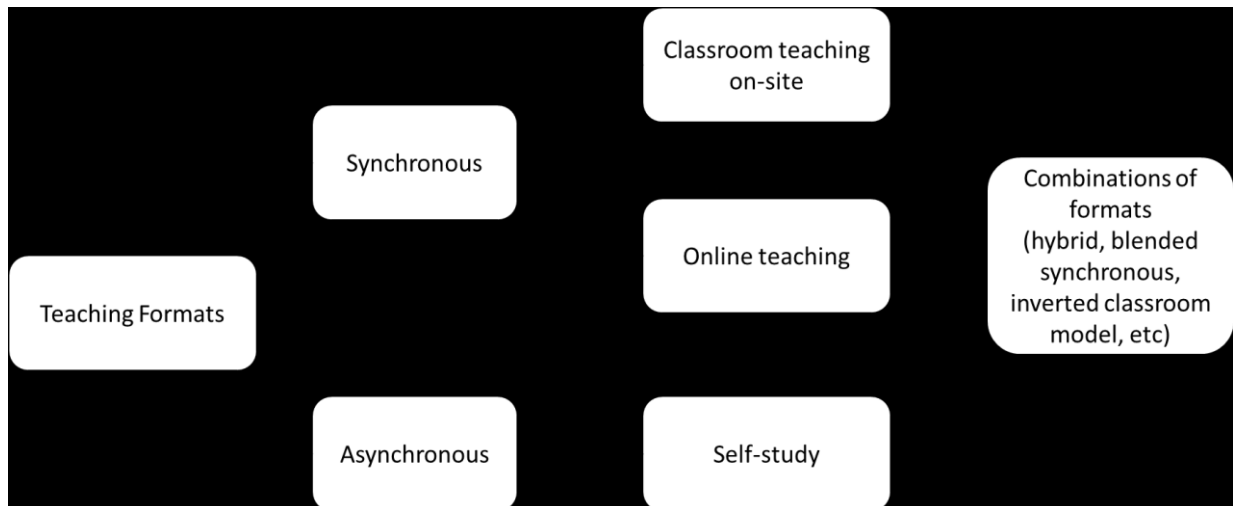
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Appendices

Appendix A – Overview of different teaching formats (in order to ensure a common understanding of the terminology used in this context)



Source: Based on Rachbauer T, Hanke, U. (2021)