

Workshop 1.6: How 'student engagement' looks to students

Nick Berg, Consultant

To ensure students can effectively influence their learning and teaching experience we first have to convince them to get involved. This workshop will review some of the ways we currently promote student engagement to students and consider if there are ways to improve the message we put across

Session outline

- Discuss the media and messages used to promote student engagement.
- Discuss limitations of this approach
- Outline a new approach to building engagement

About me

Was an elected student officer in late
1980's

Worked for NUS, LSU, UNSWU, Essex, ULU
Freelance consultant since 2007

Working around strategic thinking and
leadership

Frequent speaker and writer about student
representation, student engagement and
student rights

First time at SPARQS conference!

Current situation

Pace of change slowing down

Running up against limitations & constraints

Marginal return on effort declining

In a bit of a rut

Loss of direction, vision, excitement etc

Looking for some fresh ideas

Promoting student engagement is hard

Propensity to receive information limits impact of transmission

i.e. there are barriers that stop message getting through

Medium is part of the problem

Posters & all written media don't persuade they at best amplify or re-enforce

Engagement is about hopes and emotions not just processes or duty

Trying to promote participation through a non-participatory medium

You can't sell engagement through an un-engaging process

Media-message misalignment

Oxymoronic communication

Undermining communication

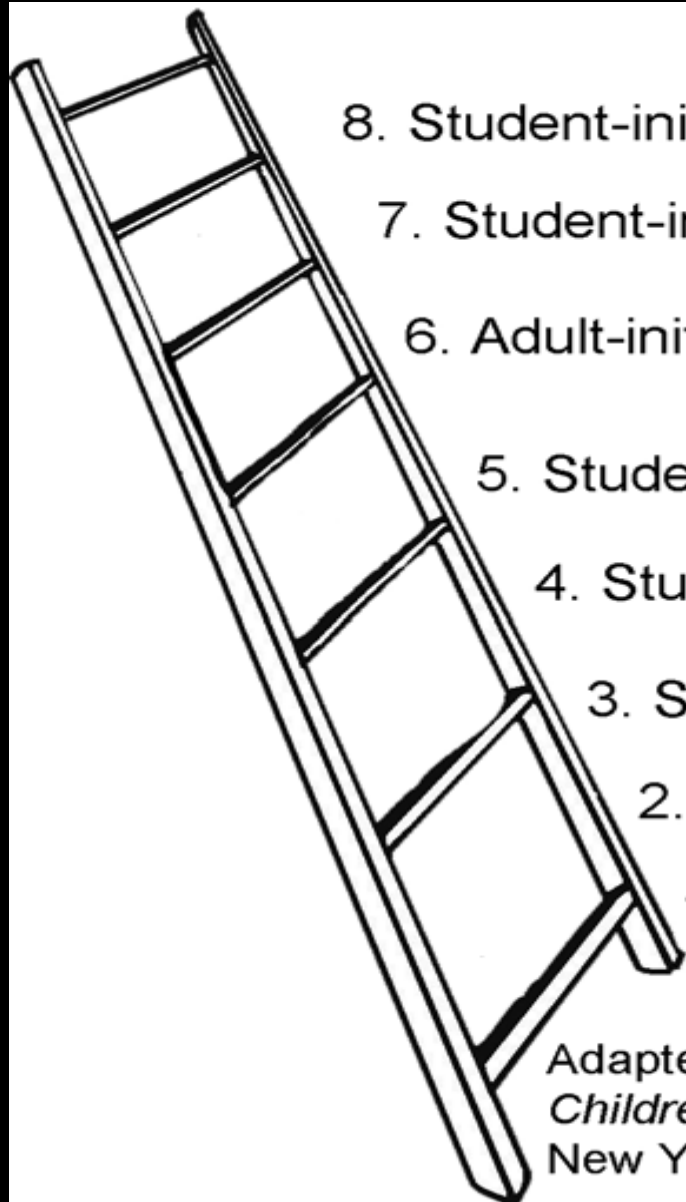
Levels of student engagement

Level one – engaged in your processes to your ends

Complete your survey, participate in your committee, participate within your paradigm

Level two – engaged via own experiences and views

Talk about my life and experiences about the issues that matter to me, be listened to and responded to



8. Student-initiated, shared decisions with adults
7. Student-initiated, student-led decisions
6. Adult-initiated, shared decisions with students
5. Students informed and consulted
4. Students informed and assigned
3. Students tokenized
2. Students are decoration
1. Students manipulated

Degrees of Participation

Degrees of
Non-participation

Adapted by A. Fletcher from R. Hart (1994).
Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship.
New York: UNICEF.

Funnelling raw feedback



To engage students you have to capture their experiences. This means going beyond what the institution thinks it can control. It creates messy data. Shaping that data needs to be student led.

Drivers of Engagement

Identity

Community

Outcomes

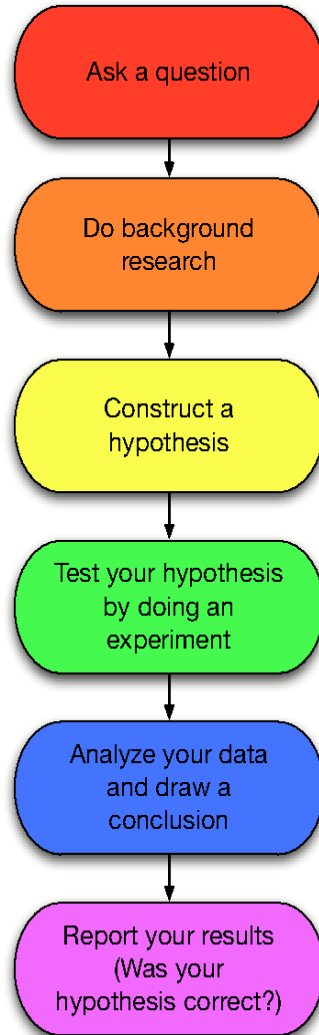
Interest alignment

Emotional alignment

Habits & culture

The scientific method

The Scientific Method



I feel that university decision makers sometimes don't dig into research results enough & are too quick to impose own interpretations on results, which reflect their paradigm

Data interpretation traps

Illustration 1 – University of the Arts

“We also see this through our own results in the National Student Survey where, in 2010, there were 766 comments (out of 1502 positive comments) regarding a positive contact experience with a member of UAL staff (including lecturers, associate lecturers, technicians, and tutors). That’s just under 50% of all the positive comments! “

Illustration 2 – dealing with cheating

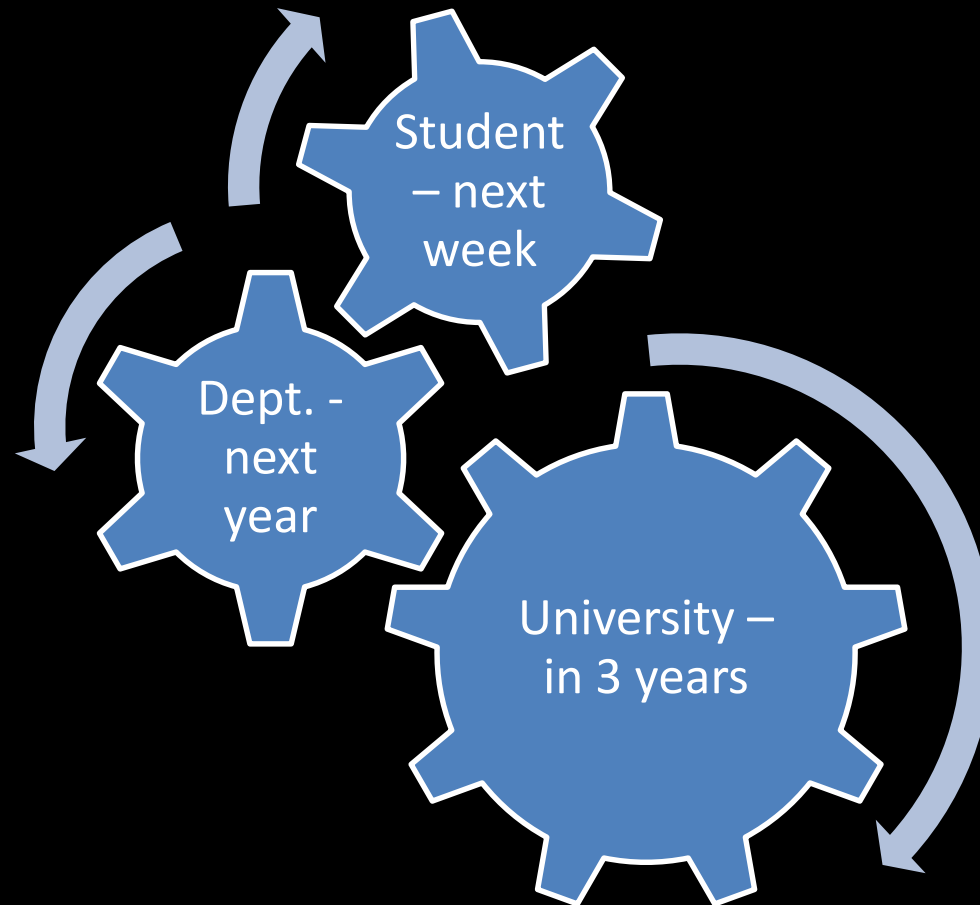
Responsiveness

Responsiveness will become a key driver of satisfaction & engagement

Responsiveness = Quantity of responses x Speed of response / Awareness of action

$$\frac{Q \times S}{A} = R$$

Different paradigms – change & time



Issues outside the envelope

- Control of time
- Control of space
 - Microwaves
 - Lockers
 - Water fountains
 - Social space
- Unfriendly & unhelpful lecturers
- Bullying

Paradigm clash

The nature of HE teaching & power
dynamics

No real need or desire to change this

Many, many barriers to change in teaching
philosophy

No appetite to tackle individuals & depts.

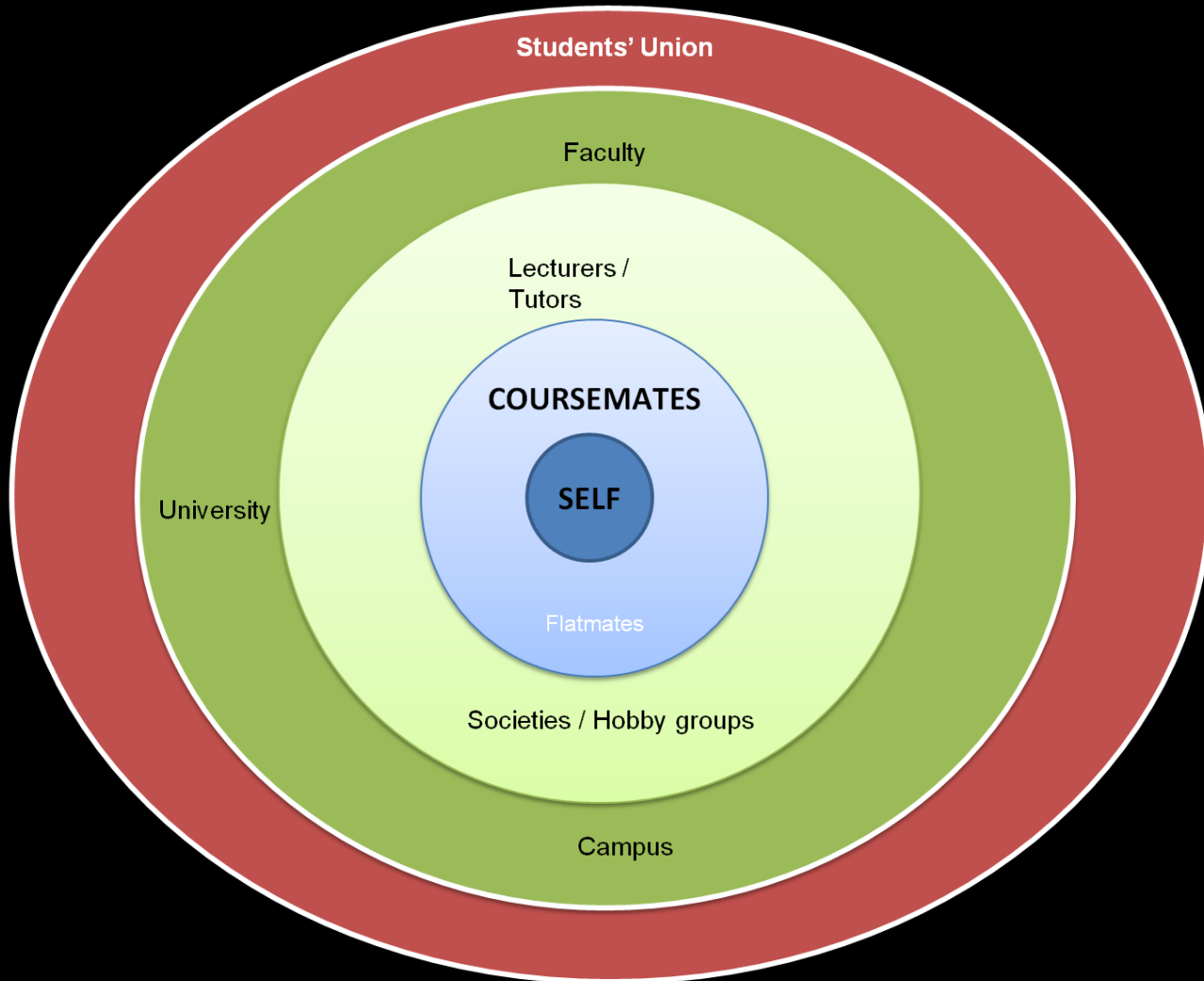
It can be hard to shift from existing
paradigms..

The model of the sun and planets going around the Earth was the "astronomical clock of Don Giovanni De Dondi of Padua."

It was completed around 1350 and took him 16 years but sadly the original was lost leaving only the drawings from which a replica was constructed and can now be seen in the Smithsonian

National conference on
student engagement

Me Map



A fresh approach

Not instead of but as well as

Imagine I had been appointed to massively
improve student engagement on a particular
course

Think of challenge as shifting behaviours

Want to make student engagement a habit

Want to make student engagement intrinsic

Want student engagement to be enjoyable

& desirable not a duty

Engagement and feedback

The essence of student engagement is giving (& receiving feedback)

Increase feedback skills to increase engagement

Formative behaviours & modelling

Frequency & repetition

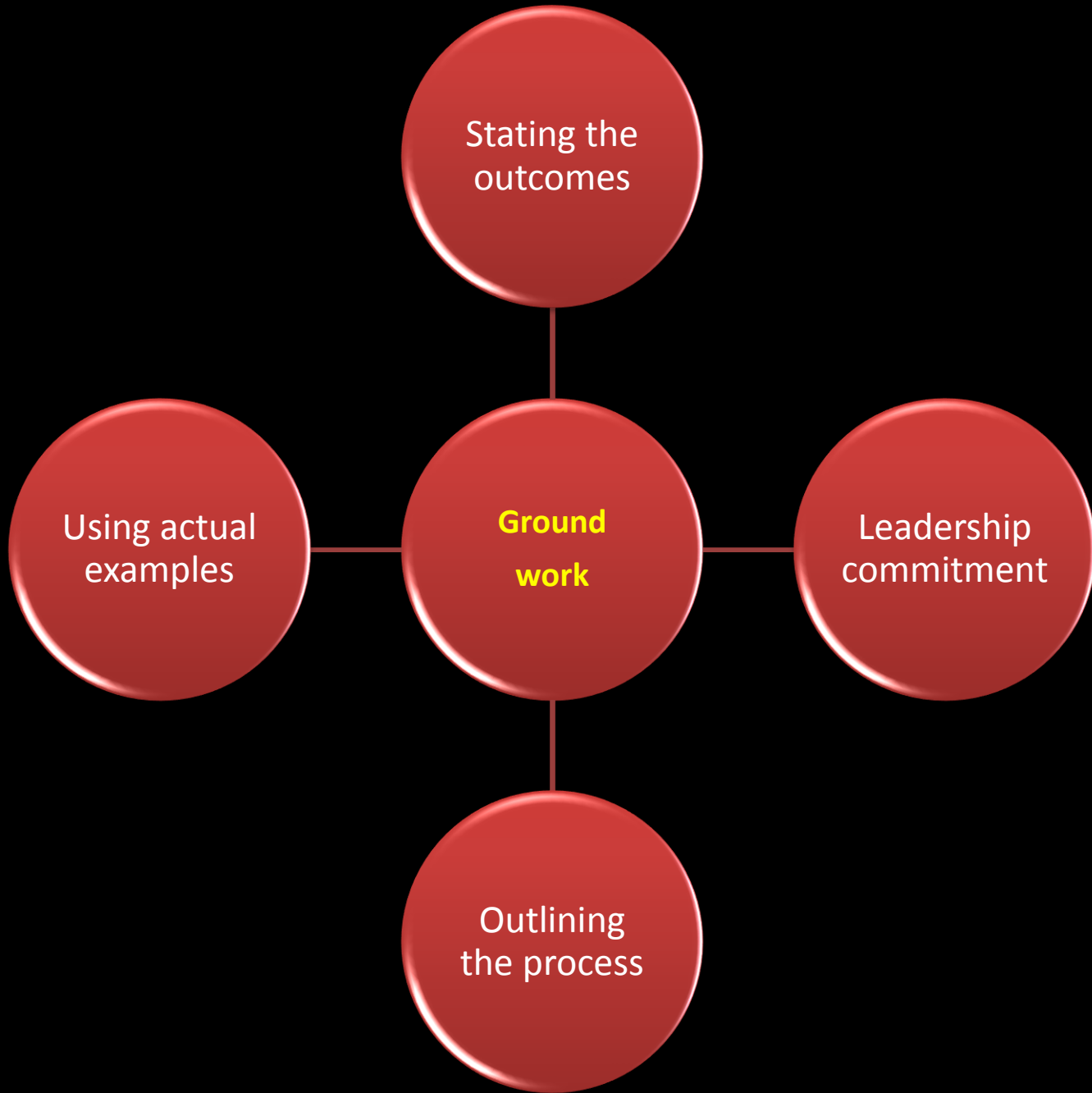
Tangible visible outcomes

Make engagement about power and self-development

Imagine that it's a training course...

- use experiential learning
- Rehearse & simulate
- Lead to real activity
- repeat







Giving &
receiving
feedback

Sense
making &
action

**Skills
Induction**

Practice

Feedback

A diagram consisting of two purple circles connected by a horizontal line. The left circle contains the word "Experience" in yellow text, and the right circle contains the word "Induction" in white text.

Experience

Induction





Agreed changes

Action

Issue identification

Elect course-reps

Outline future feedback opportunities



Better still start even earlier...

- Feedback on application / selection process
- Feedback on pre-arrival material
- Include on-line activity about feedback

Other possible feedback points

After first assignment

At end of 1st semester

At start of 2nd semester

At end of year

After new activities

Around different teaching methods

- Lectures
- Group-work
- Seminars / tutorials
- About dissertations
- About fieldtrips
- About examinations
- About on-line resources
- About libraries
- About learning community

Expand horizons

- Contact with other similar courses & years inside the university
- Opportunities to influence wider university
- Contact with similar courses at other institutions
- Contact with ex-students
- Material about higher-education

Goals focus

- Initial focus on the tangible
- A means to an end not an end in itself
- Then it develops into an end
- Purpose of the course student engagement process is:
 - To make course better for students
 - Based on their opinion
 - Sub-goals – same but for each component
 - Better induction
 - Better experience of assignments

But...

- As well as not instead of
- Who delivers the training?
- Requires real skill & experience
- Poor courses will struggle to get good engagement

Summary

- Focus on student life-journeys and experiences to remove the paradigm frame
- Develop the skills and behaviours of engagement
- Make the process, fun and fulfilling
- Avoid drawing false conclusions from data
- Speed up responsiveness