

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Title: When Students and Universities View Learning Differently: Implications for Engagement and Success

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When Students and Universities Define Learning Differently: Implications for Engagement and Success

How learning is understood by universities, academics and students themselves has implications for teaching-learning-assessment (TLA) practices, student engagement and student success. Yet the conceptions of learning that inform curriculum design and TLA practices are rarely examined alongside how students themselves understand what learning means to them. This disconnect may represent a significant contributor to student disengagement and underperformance.

Drawing on a qualitative-dominant interpretive case study, this paper examines how undergraduate Law students understand learning and how their conceptions compare with academic and institutional understandings. Academic and institutional conceptions were derived from literature and institutional documents informing curriculum and TLA practices. Illeris' (2009) multidimensional theory of learning and constructivist perspectives on learning as an active, contextual and transformative process provided the theoretical lens.

Empirical data were generated through a pilot questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with Law students. Interview data were analysed using Saldaña's (2021) coding framework.

Preliminary findings reveal that students predominantly understand learning as knowledge acquisition oriented towards passing modules and achieving career goals, in contrast to academic and institutional conceptions that focus on learning as an active, transformative, social and self-directed process.

The paper argues that this misalignment between academic and student conceptions of learning represents an important dimension of student engagement and success. Divergent understandings of learning may help explain why students do not always engage with learning opportunities in the ways universities intend, with implications for curriculum design, academic development and student transition initiatives.