Editorial

This issue of Student Engagement in Higher Education is published while most higher education students and staff across the world are subject to stringent physical distancing regulations in the midst of the 2020 Covid-19 epidemic. Whilst many students study at a distance anyway, most continue to be registered at on-campus institutions and the last few months have brought many challenges to student engagement. The work of the RAISE network seems more important than ever.

In this issue, there are five articles which all circle back to the importance of relationships in building engagement and partnership. Linton et al have looked at the factors which affect student engagement; whilst the physical environment is one of these, there are many other factors which can be replicated in a remote teaching situation. The paper gives some useful pointers for focus, even when physical distancing is the rule: "helpful and approachable staff, encouraging students to care, developing confidence, encouraging a sense of community" can all be developed when we are remote from one another.

Hwang has focused on campus-based interactions, but the importance of relationships to engagement is a clear finding from the research, particularly interactions with non-teaching staff. Again, these are messages which can be applied in different teaching situations.

Donald Comi reports on research with freshmen (first year students) and their perceptions of the different activities which have been offered to support their engagement with the university. He says "Relationships foster connection, and connection fosters fit or belonging." These may be challenges to us as more institutions operate remote learning for shorter or longer periods, but again, it helps to give staff focus on what students view as important.

 In a practical application of a technique to improve engagement with student voice, Sewell et al report on the use of solution-focused approaches. The partnership approach to collecting data was valued, and once again, relationships were identified as a key factor.

Speight et al round off the article section by reporting on the findings of what may currently seem a quaint idea; bringing students and staff from eleven different universities together to discuss the future of higher education. The article explores the challenges of partnership and its impact on identities. This theme of identity and power is picked up in the case study by Pownall and Hossain, who report on a postgraduate research student-led workshop on feminist pedagogies.

As usual, we have a rich array of case studies which showcase different approaches to building engagement. Unintentionally topical, Morley and Carmichael consider the use of socio-constructivist approaches to design an online module and its impact on student engagement with the course.

Many of the case studies are jointly authored by students and staff, in their own right developing the notion of shared power and voice. These case studies tend to look at non-curricular activities, or extra-curricular activities, although it isn't a rule. O'Neill and Wood complement this joint authorship by providing intertextual commentary on their research in their own voices alongside the conventional reporting. Rosario et al provide their personal reflections at the end of their article on student-led evaluation of teaching spaces. The student voice piece, from Candiss Argent, relates to one of the case studies (Hamshire et al) and supplements the case study by considering the impact of participation on an individual right through to graduation and employment (disclaimer: I am a co-author on the case study – and also learned a huge amount from participation in the project). Fredericks looks at the overt use of career advancement sessions to promote student engagement and relationship-building.

Pedagogic techniques to encourage engagement form the basis for three of the articles. Following up on an [earlier article in SEHEJ](#) which looked at staff attitudes to team-based learning (TBL), Nelson and Tweddell explore the impact of TBL on curriculum, student outcomes, and academic staff development in this issue. Manfrin et al look at Active Learning and its impact on engagement and higher-order thinking. We then close the issue with a lively and creative piece from Bride, describing a module where students are encouraged to invent 'fantastic creatures' in order to reflect on 'the nature of knowledge and different means by which it can be validated'. The broader impact of this work on students should lead you to think of ways you can try something similar, if less ambitious, in your own practice.