Welcome to the RAISE Journal

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It is with great pleasure that we launch the first issue of this journal. The genesis of this journal is as far back as the creation of RAISE itself and one of our first goals was to produce a journal to focus specifically on all aspects of student engagement (SE). We have had long debates about how to develop such a journal, e.g. whether it should be: an in-house production; sit within an existing journal; or tied to one of the big publishing houses. This dialogue and debate characterises how we work together in RAISE, which can mean that it takes a while to get plans into implementation but embodies the values and ethos of RAISE; to be democratic, inclusive, and to consider many perspectives before acting. Indeed, it would be rather contradictory if members were not fully engaged in all that we do.

There have been several false starts with the journal, with collaborations with other journals not going forward as the world of journal publishing is turbulent with too many having rather a short life. Thus we have been determined to ensure our journal Student Engagement in Higher Education (SEHEJ) is set up on a firm basis. We are delighted to see it come to fruition and with such a good range of contributions from staff and students. We thank them all for providing such interesting material, and thank them too for their patience and putting up with the long gestation period of this first edition.

The RAISE network
A focus on student engagement has become very salient in recent years. However, there has previously been a lack of conceptual clarity and scholarly evidence gathering about the nature of student engagement. From a desire to make sense of all that and to develop well founded policy and practice, a new collaboration was created in 2009. RAISE (Researching, Advancing and Inspiring Student Engagement) is a network of staff and students drawn from those who are working and/or interested in promoting the scholarship and practice of student engagement in higher education around the world. The original membership of four staff from one country has grown to over one thousand across twenty countries and six continents, in just over seven years. The aims of RAISE are to create opportunities for staff and students to come together for beneficial scholarly discussion, create collaborative projects, share good practice and lobby for investment and better policies locally, nationally and across our international community.

Fundamental to RAISE is an ethos of partnership, equality and inclusivity. We work in partnership with students to promote and share good practice, enhancing the

scholarship of learning and teaching learning, and building collaborative educational communities. Maintaining that in the turbulent context of contemporary higher education has not always been easy and as we expand, becomes even more fraught.

The perspective of RAISE on student engagement
An early imperative of RAISE, and one which we return to regularly to reflect on and reconsider, is defining and conceptualising student engagement. The membership of RAISE includes those who were the pioneers of the concept in the UK and we have spent much time refining these ideas. An early project of RAISE was the publication of a book integrating the themes of SE. *Developing and understanding student engagement* (Bryson, 2014) is an apposite title because it distinguishes the dual nature of work on SE. We need to make sense of the nature of student engagement itself, i.e. '(individual) students engaging'. At the same time, there much effort and focus on 'engaging (many) students', also referred to as student engagement. This duality is reflected in the definition of engagement adopted by RAISE and underpinned by theoretical argument in the book (ibid: p. 17):

> *Student engagement is about what a student brings to Higher Education in terms of goals, aspirations, values and beliefs and how these are shaped and mediated by their experience whilst a student. SE is constructed and reconstructed through the lenses of the perceptions and identities held by students and the meaning and sense a student makes of their experiences and interactions.*
> [and]
> *As players in and shapers of the educational context, educators need to foster educationally purposeful SE to support and enable students to learn in constructive and powerful ways in order to realize their potential in education and society.*

Thus, the complex, multi-construct nature of student engagement, and the point that is both a process and an outcome, comes into sharp focus when we ask 'how', 'when/where' and 'to what' questions. In the diverse contexts of higher education definitions and approaches to such a wide-ranging set of ideas and practices can become equally diverse and somewhat ambiguous. A sharp example of this is when SE becomes part of institutional policy. In some cases the policy developers are not so familiar with the actual concept and nature of SE. In such situations the values and goals of fostering student engagement can become misappropriated and objectives pursued in such a way as to be the antithesis of SE. There is now a body of work critiquing SE, as it seen as a managerialist and neo-liberal form of control (Zepke, 2015). This has much more to do with exercising power and control over students to comply and behave in prescribed ways in a world where there are invidious and pervasive commodification forces on all forms of education. In the UK, the way that the Teaching Excellence Framework is currently designed, is the latest example of thinking in which education is much more about 'having' than 'becoming' (Fromm, 1978). Rather bizarrely, despite widespread recognition of how important fostering student engagement is, it is absent in the metrics (or more accurately, proxies) put forward to measure teaching excellence.

Such ideas and policies do not conform with the values of RAISE, and we reject 'transactionalism' in favour of 'transformation'. Indeed one key value of student

engagement is that it is the prerequisite to transformational learning (Johansson & Felten, 2015) as it enables students to be ready and willing to embrace new ways of seeing themselves, others and world, and to aspire to self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2007). Furthermore, the development of concepts and practices around student as partners has been very welcome and timely counter to the appropriation of the values and aims of higher education. There is much work in RAISE on this approach and that is reflected in the excellent examples of good practice in this first edition of SEHEJ. Opinions pieces from staff and students also demonstrate, most eloquently, the educational and lasting benefit to all parties of working cooperatively, collaboratively and in partnership.

The aims of the RAISE journal
The norms for scholarly higher education groups are to hold conferences, undertake rigorous research and disseminate that though quality controlled outlets such as journals. Such spaces and places are all too frequently inaccessible to students, particularly undergraduate students, and also to staff whose roles are less 'traditional academics'. With this journal we have sought to disrupt this hegemony by giving all staff and students not just access but equal and active participation and control. That is not without its challenges, not least the practicalities of communication and reach, as well as financing such participation at our conferences and meetings, and publications.

The goal of trying to be more inclusive and accessible to new authors, and be more imaginative about what a journal can offer the diverse membership of RAISE, balanced against ensuring that the published contributions are as rigorous as they can be, has not been easy. It has certainly been a steep learning curve for all concerned particularly the editorial team and reviewers. For this journal to be successful and to continue in the long term it needs to strike the right balance of accessibility and 'quality'. We recognise that academic journals perceived to have the highest quality, and thus most desirable to publish in a world of REF or its equivalents around the world, tend to have very high rejection rates. In RAISE we are about sharing and development not rejection. Therefore we wish to maintain quality but in more patient and developmental ways (see below).

We were determined to produce the first edition in time for the 2016 RAISE conference and decided to publish a slightly hybrid edition which covers both work submitted in a more standard way and thematic work developed by our special interest groups (SIG). Consequently we note the case studies about partnership emerging through that SIG. There is whole special section of work linking student engagement with assessment and feedback. Thus this is a 'bumper edition'! Future editions are likely to be smaller but more regular with a balance between papers and practice/case studies and more student contributions, in partnership and sole authored. So, in order to facilitate that:

Future arrangements for SEHEJ
The learning we gained in producing this edition has been incorporated into a new model of journal submission and organisation. More detail is available on the journal and main RAISE website but in summary:

- New authors (and those with a more innovative idea) are encouraged strongly to write a submission proposal to get feedback on before pressing ahead and composing the full article.
- Authors may choose an alternative route to standard submission, for review. This is called the developmental route where after submitting a draft, they work with a mentor, to develop that draft into its full potential.
- We have a wide range of submission types. We have developed clear guidance on each which all authors should follow, including templates to make keeping to format easier.
- We encourage non-text submissions. So do consider submitting short films, animations, audio files/podcasts or other forms of media that can be shared on-line.
- We aim to involve students and staff and those have who not reviewed before. They will have an induction and develop process, and support throughout the process.
- The same policy applies to editing. We have created a team of experienced senior editors, a team of whom will take responsibility for each edition (thus sharing this task). Associate editors are being appointed, who will be inducted and supported by the senior editors.
- A team ethos for reviewers and editors will be fostered by meeting (virtually in the main) to discuss policies, practices and any issues arising.
- Writing retreats are planned to create a supportive and focussed space for developing submissions.

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