

ESS Question 5: There were opportunities for useful interaction and engagement with other students in the subject

Themes

ABP student voices described the qualities associated with useful interaction and engagement with other students as:

1. **Inclusive** – Opportunities to interact are designed to fit within, and contribute to, a supportive learning environment.
2. **Motivating** – Interaction is made effective by employing approaches that support learning engagement and belonging.
3. **Directed** – Informed by a collective approach, whereby the teaching team shares a common understanding of how interaction supports broader subject aims.

Note: The third theme 'Directed' was not explicitly articulated by student comments in the ESS. Rather, through engagement with staff, it became clear that this kind of 'behind-the-scenes' activity helped teaching teams to be more intentional about how they might achieve the first two themes of 'Inclusive' and 'Motivating'.

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1. **Inclusive** – Opportunities to interact are designed to fit within, and contribute to, a supportive learning environment.

Tactic	Example	Things to Consider
Fostering a welcoming and safe environment conducive to peer-to-peer interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – LMS-based subject- and tutorial-level discussion boards to encourage asynchronous peer interaction – Creation of informal 'sub-cohorts' to scale down interaction – Students who rely on reading and/or referring to notes are encouraged – Easy 'warm-up' questions designed to instigate a lively discussion or debate – Expectations of behaviours integrated into the curriculum, including provision of clear guidance to students on how to communicate respectfully – Introductory activity related to topic (e.g., their favourite building) for students to get to know one another 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Consider how overtly to encourage students to engage in discussion – Attendance levels will impact the opportunities and quality of interaction between students – Cultivating a safe and comfortable atmosphere can also encourage informal interaction amongst students – Be aware of how individual students might react to being called upon – Student familiarity with one another will vary by program level (e.g. first-year students may not know anyone within their cohort)
Celebrating and remaining attentive to all student voices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Soliciting feedback from students over the semester, and being responsive to differing levels of engagement – Students encouraged to share their own knowledge with peers to cultivate a socially constructed learning experience – Conscious effort made to highlight diverse and relevant life experiences – Two 'layers' of interaction (e.g., a live discussion and then a reflection) can encourage engagement from a range of voices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Balancing various voices can be tricky! Sometimes efforts to manage interaction can create further engagement issues – Consider making yourself available after intense and dynamic discussion sessions where students may feel vulnerable and wish to touch base – Staff should be prepared to step in when conversations have strayed from being respectful
Using interaction to promote engagement with diverse perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Tutorial activities designed to allow students to rotate and interact with all peers – Readings included from multiple perspectives (e.g., Western/Indigenous/ Global South) as a way to foster diverse engagement – Weekly changes to tutorial format (formative text, drawing, site visits), each associated with different form of interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Consider the most effective ways of addressing language barriers – Consider how to encourage equitable participation across the cohort – Group work can be an effective way for students to encounter diverse perspectives—with implications for group formation/composition
Advancing a shared language to encourage effective interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Drawing or other non-verbal modes of interaction encouraged (e.g., 'silent crits' using comments via post-it notes), rather than always relying on discussion – Tasks that encourage interaction and working together through a spatial lens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Effective interactions are facilitated through a shared 'language' that all participants have access to, equipping all students with the capacity to communicate with peers
Encouraging student agency through peer-to-peer interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Opportunities for student-led discussions or session facilitation – Identification of thematic connections enable creation of informal study groups – Students invited to select case studies that will fuel discussion with peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Be aware that some students may not be as confident in leading interactive activities – Consider tutorial facilitation as an option, framed as 'showing up for each other' – Students will have differing levels of confidence in asserting their opinions, and careful consideration should be taken to ensure all students are afforded the opportunity to voice them

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Related Student Quotations

Overall I am very happy with my tutor's eagerness to convince students to be engaged and discuss our ideas during class.

The environment my studio leader cultivated in class lead to my being able to engage in meaningful and enlightening discussion with my peers. This didn't always have anything to do with coursework but I found myself glad to be able to enjoy and look forward to my studio time each week rather than dread getting feedback. This would encourage me to continue with my work rather than demotivate me in my private time.

The workshop classes provided unique opportunities to talk to students and share thoughts and ideas. I believe this was helped by my tutor and classmates, as we were readily willing to make it a very welcoming environment for everyone to share their ideas and collaborate together.

Our tutor was amazing, and the opportunities for collaboration with our classmates were similarly brilliant. They supported us throughout the subject by showing examples and being incredibly open to feedback. They also created a safe space to ask questions and interact with our classmates which was incredibly beneficial

I really enjoyed the collaboration we did in class including sharing our ideas on certain topics or working together to solve issues.

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2. **Motivating** – Interaction is made effective by employing approaches that support learning engagement and belonging.

Tactic	Example	Things to Consider
Employing strategies to facilitate interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Required preparatory and/or reflective activities (e.g., on Canvas) used to promote an effective pattern of interaction – Collaborative activities designed to build momentum to engagement (e.g. simple tasks to develop relationships near the beginning of the semester) – Intent of interactive activities discussed and demonstrated by modelling interactive approaches – Expectations of peer-to-peer tasks clarified through preparation requirements, intended outcomes, communication protocols, communicated clearly to students well ahead of the scheduled event – Online platforms (e.g. whiteboard) used to facilitate interaction and engagement by sharing information related to the task at hand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Plan ahead to allow time for discussion, with plenty of flexibility – Students are very likely contacting each other outside of class and engaging in informal interaction; consider how to build on this
Explicitly aligning interactive activities to other elements of the subject learning experience (e.g., delivered content, assessment tasks, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Artefacts or models (or even guests) used to focus interaction – Roleplaying (e.g., stakeholders) as a form of peer-to-peer interaction – Site visits, learning on Country as a setting conducive to interaction – Use of timetabled lecture to facilitate a student debate or panel related to subject material – Interactive activities as scaffolding that build skills towards assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Be aware of structural barriers (e.g., timetable) for organising interactive opportunities – Consider demonstrating the value of interaction (including peer feedback and collaboration) for professional skill development
Foregrounding interactive elements of peer feedback and group work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Discussion board or social annotation activities with weighting that encourages interaction (and promote notion of peer support) – Informal desk crit sessions for students to provide low-stakes feedback to one another – In-class time allocated to work on group projects, especially at the beginning to help develop scope, identify roles and responsibilities, establish shared objectives, etc. – Group project broken down into tasks, each with a focus on interactive elements and not just the submitted output 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Shared tasks can promote interaction, but be aware of language barriers – Be aware of power dynamics between students and their range of skills related to evaluating one another effectively – Consider using a ‘group charter’ to set objectives related to peer engagement and interaction, with focus on positive dynamics – Peer review can be a way of promoting confidence by allowing students to articulate their expertise – Some students may feel anxious about interaction being assessed – It may be necessary to articulate the value of peer feedback or groupwork for student ‘buy-in’

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Related Student Quotations

Doing the readings and having class discussions about them were great – doing the discussion board before class meant that everyone had at least thought about some aspect of the reading to a degree so they had opinions about it which meant for a greater conversation.

Being able to 'cross-pollinate' with other studios was nice in viewing others' work (different to those in my own studio) and receiving feedback from students whom I had to explain my project and brief from a blank slate.

Taking on a colleague initiated facilitation session truly helps learning together and make the readings more accessible.

Where we had the chance to review our peers' work and provide feedback, was particularly beneficial. This experience helped us grasp the marking rubrics more comprehensively and identify the areas that were lacking in our own work.

Engaging in groups also allowed us to learn from others and learn to work together in ways that maximize our efficiency/best skills.

The weekly reading social activity was really helpful for me to understand the topics and also allow students to share their thoughts and opinions without pressure.

Engaging activities during tutorials and the site visits were helpful

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3. **Directed** – Informed by a collective approach, whereby the teaching team shares a common understanding of how interaction supports broader subject aims.

Tactic	Example	Things to Consider
Setting up processes to ensure consistency across tutorials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Use of tutor briefing sessions to share teaching practices related to interaction (e.g., how to draw out quieter students, strategies for inclusion) and establish shared protocols – Tutorial plans that situate interaction in the context of other activities and guide tutors on the appropriate length of time spent on each activity – Interactive activities collaboratively designed across the teaching team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Amount of direction and structure needed may differ between levels/programs – Consider varying tutor skillsets regarding facilitation of interaction – Not all interaction activities require pre-scheduling; consider providing autonomy for tutors to determine 'on the fly' the most effective time for opportunities – Consider time and budget for tutor training and resources – Be careful to balance personal teaching style with the need for consistency (noting that tutors 'being themselves' can promote a supportive learning environment)
Establishing shared objectives and values related to interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Tutors encouraged to not be the sole/authoritative voice in tutorials (i.e., noting the different teaching roles in lecture vs tutorial format) – Compassionate practices demonstrated to tutors by checking in regularly and providing opportunities for discussing issues – Interactive activities designed to align with subject content, while affording opportunities to demonstrate the subject's intended learning outcomes and generic skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Teaching style may influence student responses to peer interaction (i.e., by encouraging or discouraging engagement)
Developing mechanisms for accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Tutor capacity designed to increase over time (e.g., through peer feedback between tutors, regular check-ins, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Consider the most appropriate and effective forms of feedback to evaluate teaching quality across tutorials, including whether (and when) to observe tutorials

References

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