Research article

All carrot – no stick: an alternative award framework to enhance 'international' students' sense of belonging and engagement in the extracurricular

Harry Harrop,[1,*] Stephanie Hoppitt[1,*]

[1] University of Leeds, Leeds, UK
* Correspondence: g.e.harrop@leeds.ac.uk; s.hoppitt@leeds.ac.uk

How to cite

Peer review

Copyright

Open access

Abstract

A sense of belonging and feeling at home at their institution are key factors in student success at university. Engaging with extracurricular activities is part of this dynamic, and an area in which 'international' students face additional barriers. These include institutional and psychological barriers to belonging, resulting in a shortage of meaningful opportunities to belong and a lack of motivation to take part. Increased belonging uncertainty and negative stereotype threat are among the potential concerns for such students. In response, we have developed the Student Extracurricular Engagement Award for pre-sessional undergraduate students at the University of Leeds Language Centre, UK. This scheme draws on theoretical approaches related to co-construction, participation, identity, opportunity and motivation. This innovative educational intervention seeks to address the issues affecting belonging by providing encouragement and guidance

in engaging with the university's extracurricular activities. By validating activities in areas other than academic language and literacies, the award raises student awareness of the value of their successes in those areas. This more holistic and rhizomatic approach to student learning is argued to bring a greater sense of belonging to 'international' students.

Keywords extracurricular; belonging; Student Extracurricular Engagement Award; home-making; participation; identity; motivation; opportunity; international student; pre-sessional undergraduate course

Introduction

Few educators would disagree that a sense of belonging and feeling at home at their institution is vital to the student experience, and the link between student engagement in activities outside the classroom and academic success has been well-documented for 'home' students (Freeman, 2017; Guilmette et al., 2019; King et al., 2021). Recently, this correlation has been linked more explicitly to the successful creation of a sense of belonging within the social and academic community (De Sisto et al., 2022; Farrell, 2008; Knifsend et al., 2018). For all students, whether entering their first year in higher education or first year at an English-medium institution, it is this initial period that is seen as the most critical in terms of enabling successful short-term and longer-term transition to that environment (Bransford et al., 2006; Burnett, 2007; Krause and Coates, 2008). It is also widely accepted that students need support through this process (Krause and Coates, 2008; Nelson and Kift, 2005).

However, supporting transition and trying to create this sense of belonging in 'international' students is fraught with additional challenges, including linguistic barriers and cultural transition. Negative stereotype threat could also be a factor, where 'international' students' own perceptions of how members of their social group may perform in extracurricular activities can affect their own confidence and performance. These obstacles could prevent students from fully participating in campus life outside the classroom.

In response to this situation, we have introduced the Student Extracurricular Engagement (SEE) Award for pre-sessional undergraduate students at the University of Leeds Language Centre, UK. This framework for student engagement outside the classroom aims to motivate and guide 'international' students in successfully exploring extracurricular activities and community engagement, thus easing their transition from their pre-undergraduate programme into the wider university, while developing vital communication and social skills at a critical stage in their personal and professional development. Christie et al. (2008: 570) have described transitioning as 'loss of identity', and supporting students in building new empowering identities through engagement in the extracurricular is central to the SEE Award.

The initiative includes a strong element of co-construction as students negotiate both suitable activities and the form of evidence they wish to submit for consideration with their SEE adviser, and the fact that the framework accepts alternative forms of evidence to writing minimises linguistic barriers to participation. Thus, the award maintains a strict 'all carrot – no stick' stance in terms of evidencing achievement and commitment, with the aim of creating opportunities for autonomy, student self-regulation and success. It is also designed to build confidence through experience and to validate social engagement through certification, thus incentivising home-making practices within the university campus and wider city area. Participating in the extracurricular activities of their choice alongside 'home' students, as well as being a part of communities within the university, could help students to feel more at home in their new environment.

This article aims to introduce the SEE initiative, the practicalities entailed and the theories on which it is based. Further research is required to analyse the student response to it, and its success. The article discusses how the SEE Award responds to the main challenges facing 'international' students in relation to the themes of belonging and home in the campus. It addresses the rationale for the theoretical framework of the initiative, which centres on the psychology and emotional states of the learner and the

key principles of opportunity, motivation, identity, culture and community, which form essential elements in belonging and legitimate participation in the university's community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

The award framework: practicalities

The SEE Award was named to complement the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR), which accompanies a student's degree certificate at all UK universities (Cardiff Metropolitan University, n.d.; University of Essex, n.d.; University of Leeds, 2023; University of Westminster, n.d.). HEAR comprises a student's academic transcript, along with 'extra-curricular activities [the institution] believes are valuable' (Cardiff Metropolitan University, n.d.: n.p.). It was introduced in 2012 and is often connected to institutional-level frameworks and resources designed to develop soft skills (University of Leeds, 2023; University of Westminster, n.d.). Activities that might appear on a student HEAR include being a first aider, a match official, a student rep or a project manager, or doing a work placement, working part-time or participating in a Duke of Edinburgh Award (University of Essex, n.d.). The list of possible valid activities is extensive, and it is open to some negotiation between students and the validating institution. HEAR is promoted by universities as adding value to a student's degree by demonstrating the breadth of a student's achievements to others (University of Westminster, n.d.). It was this element that we sought to mirror for Language Centre students, in that the SEE Award could augment their English pre-sessional course qualifications. Unlike the HEAR, the SEE Award is optional for students, as we felt that being obliged to participate could negate the incentives to engage positively with the initiative.

The SEE Award at our institution is a small-scale project in its infancy. It is currently limited to 'international' students studying on the undergraduate pre-sessional course who intend to join the International Foundation Year or undergraduate courses the following year. It was initiated in October 2019, with nine students taking part and four achieving a bronze award, but it was curtailed by the Covid-19 pandemic. It was restarted in October 2022, with 10 students participating, representing about a quarter of the cohort. In future years, the SEE Award will be open to other cohorts at the Language Centre, with the possibility of expanding to the wider 'international' student community.

Students currently undertake the SEE Award by completing extracurricular activities alongside, but independently of, their pre-sessional course of study. Students take ownership of their awards from the start by identifying an activity they want to do, deciding which category it relates to and choosing what form of evidence to submit. Their SEE Award certificates are received at the same time as their final Language Centre module certificates.

SEE advisers

The award is run by a small team of SEE advisers, including the authors of this article, who introduce the SEE Award to the potential cohort on arrival at the Language Centre. They are then available both on a SEE Award email address and face to face. They help clarify what kind of activities would be considered acceptable, what category and level these could be classed at and what evidence of activities could be submitted. SEE advisers aim to be as approachable and encouraging as possible. Students make their own choices around activities, categories and evidence to co-create their individual SEE Award.

Activities

A list of possible extracurricular activities is provided, but students are encouraged to suggest their own; thus, a co-constructed and unique portfolio of experiences emerges for each student. Activities can be stand-alone or a series of events. The vast majority of activities suggested involve the wider university community, while some entry-level activities mainly involve the 'international' cohort. To be an accepted extracurricular activity, the activity should satisfy the following minimum requirements:

1.   not be directly connected to class or guided learning tasks
2.   be associated with a place beyond teaching spaces and student accommodation
3.   involve some element of English language.

Students are invited to make the case for the inclusion of an activity. As making students feel at home at the university is an integral part of the SEE Award, we encourage the removal of the barrier between

'international' and 'home' students. Students are thus supported to join activities which are available to 'home' students.

Categories

Participants are required to complete activities in four different categories in order to qualify for the award. The categories are Community, Culture, Skills and Free Choice, and students must complete an activity requirement within all four categories to achieve the award. The reason for having categories is to help ensure students broaden their range of skills and experiences rather than maintaining a narrow focus, and to incentivise students to move out of their comfort zones. We chose the names of the categories to be deliberately broad, so they are more inclusive and less limiting than ones named sports, hobbies or jobs might be. Students are invited to make a case for an activity satisfying one category or another. For example, attending a horse-riding event at a local stables has the overt element of skill in riding, but an East Asian society session learning origami has elements of skill, culture and community within it. Students can argue for the skills, culture or community aspects which are evident in their chosen activity with a SEE adviser.

Levels

The SEE Award recognises that students are individuals. They are at the Language Centre for differing lengths of time, and they have different strengths, interests and motivations for extracurricular engagement.

   The SEE Award can be completed at the bronze, silver or gold level to show the extent to which students have taken part in activities outside the classroom. The award can also be completed at a pace that suits each student. Bronze-level activities are deliberately intended to be easy to take part in, and they are a small step for students beyond their Language Centre programme. These are often campus-based activities that other 'international' students may attend. Bronze level could be completed in as little as a week, providing a student completes four extracurricular activities across the four categories. The award seeks to minimise barriers to entry and, by putting an initial goal within relatively easy reach, students are strongly encouraged to become involved. We felt that incentivisation was more important than creating a significant degree of challenge at this level.

   Silver level typically requires an extension of a bronze-level activity in terms of time and/or commitment, or may require engagement beyond the university. Gold level involves a significant commitment beyond silver level, and may require leadership and organisational responsibilities. Achieving gold level should take at least two months (see Table 1).

Table 1. Examples of acceptable activities for each level and category

	Levels		
	Bronze	**Silver**	**Gold**
Skills	Attend one Give It a Go session organised by a Student Union society	Write an article for the student newspaper	Join the organising committee of a Student Union club or society
Culture	Attend one session of the book club conversation group Book Chat to discuss books with other students	Visit five museums/art galleries	Organise a cultural activity for people of a different nationality from yours
Community	Attend one Global Cafe and meet other 'international' students or 'home' students wanting to meet 'international' students	Join in at least two volunteering events organised by the International Students' Office	Volunteer in a charity shop
Free Choice	Another bronze-level activity from one of the categories	Another silver-level activity from one of the categories	Another gold-level activity from one of the categories

Evidence

Students are required to submit evidence that they have attended the extracurricular activities. SEE advisers provide guidance on what they can submit and validate their submissions. As producing evidence of an activity might be seen as another barrier to participation, we welcome a wide range of evidence types. Although English-language use will form a part of the extracurricular activity itself, varying dependent on the nature of that activity, the evidence they submit need not use English. For example, they could submit a photograph from the activity or event. However, they are advised not to record or photograph people without their permission. Students may choose to submit evidence reflecting different levels of engagement with the activities. For example, a student may submit a detailed written account of an event, while another may send a photograph of an admission ticket. Such choices are for the student to make. Either would be considered acceptable evidence that they had attended. Examples of acceptable evidence include:

- a selfie at the event
- a video of the event
- a typed or handwritten paragraph reflecting on the experience
- an audio recording of the event
- an artistic response to what they did (for example, a sketch of what happened or their own drawing in the style of the art they saw)
- a scanned copy or photograph of official documents (for example, a register or an entrance ticket).

Case study 1

Araf was a Saudi student on the pre-sessional undergraduate course of English and academic study skills. (The names given for students are pseudonyms.) His first activity for the SEE Award was attending a Student Union barista workshop. After the event, he spoke excitedly about it at some length with a SEE adviser, and this was taken as oral evidence of participation in a Skills activity. At the workshop, he had met some 'home' students who were going on a Student Union trip to Liverpool the following week. He asked if that would be an acceptable activity for a SEE Award Culture activity, and we agreed that it would be. He took photographs of the coach and places that he visited in the city, and he showed them to the SEE Award team on his phone. This was taken as evidence of his participation. Later that month, he went on another trip, this time to York Railway Museum. Again, he showed photographs on his phone in a SEE adviser meeting. As he had already done a similar activity, it was suggested that he could either add this to his Culture activities, or he could use it as a Free Choice activity. Keen to find an activity to satisfy the Community requirement to achieve a bronze-level award, Araf volunteered to be part of the student committee at the Language Centre. This entailed meeting dozens of other students from different courses, gathering comments and attending meetings with the Head of School to put forward ideas as to how to improve the Language Centre. The minutes of the staff–student meeting were taken as evidence of Araf's participation. He completed his bronze-level SEE Award in three months, and he was presented with his certificate at the end of his course. He expressed a desire to continue to silver level, but Covid-19 prevented him from doing so. When commenting on the SEE Award, he explained that he had been worried he would not meet any British students because he lived and studied with Arabic speakers, but as a result of the SEE Award he had done so.

Case study 2

Honoka was a Japanese student on the pre-sessional undergraduate course of English and academic study skills. Her first activities for the SEE Award were initial taster events for three Student Union societies, and she provided photographic evidence of each: the Japanese Society, the East Asian Society and the Yoga Society. Following from these bronze-level activities, she hosted a matcha oshaberikai event for the Japanese society with 300 'home' and 'international' students, where she provided matcha tea and facilitated conversations. She emailed photographs of the event, which were taken as evidence of a Skills activity at silver level.

Honoka went on several independent trips to various cities in the UK, and she successfully argued that where she undertook a guided tour in English, these should be acceptable as bronze-level Culture

activities. Additionally, she visited a Van Gogh exhibition in York, the World Museum in Liverpool, the Royal Armouries in Leeds and the Royal Opera House Ballet *The Nutcracker* in London. She provided photographs of all these events, and argued that this should satisfy silver level in the Culture category. This was agreed.

Honoka attended the nightclub at the Student Union on several occasions. She argued that these events were the most challenging for her and that they should be counted as bronze level for Community. This was agreed. She attended Global Cafe, an informal gathering for several hours of 'international' students and people who want to meet 'international' students, at the Student Union. Her selfie at the event was taken as evidence of participation in a bronze-level Community activity. She attended four more Global Cafe events, with accompanying photographs, which satisfied silver level in Community.

Honoka did not feel that she had enough time left in the Language Centre to reach gold level. She had exceeded the requirements for silver level in the three categories of Skills, Culture and Community, and she made the case for the activities that she had already done beyond silver to be transferred to her Free Choice category. This was agreed, and she received her silver-level SEE Award.

When commenting on the SEE Award, she explained that she was concerned when studying abroad that she would not get the full experience that students who study in their home country get. She felt that the SEE Award encouraged her to get involved.

The award framework: theory

The underlying principles of the SEE Award seek to address several problems, including institutional and psychological barriers to belonging, by creating opportunities to belong, motivation to take part and developing positive identities.

Belonging

Belonging has been described as feeling *included*, *one of the family* and *at home* (Ahn, 2020; Cureton and Gravestock, 2019). As mentioned above, the academic benefits of belonging for 'home' students are manifold and well-documented, and there is much evidence to suggest that belonging is a key driver of success (Pittman and Richmond, 2007; Strayhorn, 2018; Walton and Cohen, 2011). In addition, increased rates of student persistence and retention have been reported as being connected to 'home' students' sense of belonging (Hausmann et al., 2009; Tinto, 2012). Baumeister and Leary (1995) maintain that stable belongingness should result in high levels of positive affect and emotion. Hence, an increased sense of belonging in higher education may result in higher levels of motivation and self-confidence (Freeman et al., 2007). This parallels suggestions that belonging underpins motivation and success in schools and workplaces (Eccles et al., 1993; Ryan and Deci, 2000). We suggest that belonging, positive emotional states and success are synergetic rather than sequential. In other words, the process does not start with belonging and end with success and positive experiences; instead, by creating opportunities for moments of belonging, small successes and positive experiences, all three continuously enhance each other. The SEE Award is based on the premise that supporting students in creating a sense of belonging is equally, if not more, important, for 'international' students than for 'home' students, on whom much of the current research is focused.

There is no single definition of *belonging*, but it is generally accepted to be a complex concept deeply embedded in the psyche and identity of the individual. Ahn and Davis (2019) suggest that in higher education it encompasses four different domains, namely, social and academic engagement, personal space and surroundings. In fact, significant emphasis has recently been placed on the spatial aspect of creating a sense of belonging.

Many 'home' students routinely use their Student Union building, sports centres and other spaces on campus outside their classes. According to Mulrooney and Kelly (2020), the campus beyond lecture theatres and classrooms is a space that enables social relationships to develop and be maintained. However, Mulrooney and Kelly (2020: n.p.) argue that this may not instantly be transferrable to 'international' students, whose experience of campus may be different from that of 'home' students, 'since campus space is not neutral but sends messages to groups about who and what is welcome on campus'. According to this study, perceptions of physical spaces are intrinsically linked to emotional states, and, while pleasant spaces can evoke positive emotional states, how students related to physical

space on campus was primarily emotional, resulting from feelings of belonging or not belonging. When they thought about the physical space and how it made them feel, the emotions they described, such as accepted, inclusive, comfortable and safe, all related to the overall *vibe* of the campus, rather than to specific physical spaces. The SEE Award at the University of Leeds is designed to create impetus to break through perceived spatial and social barriers by creating a sense of legitimate participation and a right to enter and use a variety of spaces in pursuit of the award.

Another obstacle to belonging is negative stereotype threat. This manifests as a group member's 'performance-disruptive apprehension' when faced with a task while aware of negative stereotypes of their group (Aronsen et al., 2002: 114). Students from ethnic minorities, for example, 'face the extra burden of knowing that their skills, and those of others in their group, could be viewed through the lens of a stereotype that questions their group's intellectual and academic abilities. This concern can occur regardless of the actual level of prejudice' (Cohen and Garcia, 2008: 366). For 'international' students, this additional burden can increase their belonging uncertainty, as they may be aware of negative stereotypes regarding being cultural, social and linguistic outsiders (Murphy and Zirkel, 2015). It has been argued that feelings of belonging are therefore more important for such group members in terms of their academic success (Murphy and Zirkel, 2015). The SEE Award cannot remedy negative stereotype threat, but, on an individual level, it could help empower a participant to feel a sense of belonging despite such complex psychological behaviours.

In addition, for 'international' students on pre-sessional English courses, there may be institutional hurdles. They are not yet formally studying their degree subjects, so they are not included in certain institutional frameworks, nor given access to resources related to the HEAR, as they are Level 0 (pre-undergraduate) students. In our experience, they may not be aware of the facilities and resources that are available to them, due to the language barrier and being outside of 'home' student social networks, and they may be unaware that the majority of university services and events are free of charge, as this may not be the case in their home country. These barriers might contribute to what is termed *belonging uncertainty* (Walton and Cohen, 2007). Where individuals have doubt about their likely acceptance or rejection in social contexts, they may tend to avoid such encounters (Cohen and Garcia, 2008). The SEE Award seeks to address this issue by providing encouragement and guidance in engaging with the university's extracurricular opportunities available to 'home' and 'international' students.

The SEE Award provides an entry point to join social groups and communities in which students can develop a sense of belonging. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that being located on the periphery of social engagement is empowering because it allows for a movement towards greater participation and centrality. This is mirrored in the SEE project, as students gradually move towards greater engagement through the different levels within the framework. Participation for an 'international' student in our context is seen as a continuum from simple attendance to being a fully included member of a community. The SEE Award provides the initial point of access, which is 'key to legitimate peripherality ... by newcomers to the community of practice and all that membership entails' (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 100). According to Fuller et al. (2005), for Lave and Wenger, belonging to a community can be achieved by continuous, active participation in social practice. The SEE Award has the potential to create informal apprentice situations where participants as newcomers can, over time, assimilate behaviours of the old timers in the group. For example, as they learn the practices of football player, art critic, shop volunteer, social conversationalist, or whichever community with which they choose to engage, a student's sense of belonging may increase as they begin to identify with members of the community.

For 'international' students seeking to learn English, along with the norms, behaviours and practices of students at a UK university, a sizeable proportion of learning takes place away from formal activities such as lectures and seminars. Lave and Wenger (1991: 35) consider learning to be integral to 'generative social practice in the lived-in world'. For 'international' students, especially at the pre-undergraduate level, it is comparatively easy to experience a sense of belonging in the classroom, as they perceive themselves among peers, and they are participating in the activities of the community. Educators also have a reasonable level of control over highlighting achievement and success in terms of structured learning activities through judicious use of learning outcomes and goal-setting. It is interesting to see that the forward-looking, planned and hypothetical nature of classroom learning and teaching often seems to hold more value than the here and now, needs-based experience of learning when engaged in social communities of practice. Students may not always see the value in participating in extracurricular activities, as there is often little formal recognition of learning, achievements and success involved. As a result, they might avoid such activities, thus excluding themselves from social communities and practices,

and from the sense of belonging that they foster. Participation is thus the key driver of the SEE Award, from which belonging and achievement have the opportunity to flow.

Motivation

The SEE Award seeks to increase student motivation by validating activities in areas other than academic language and literacies, and thus to raise student awareness of the value of their successes in those areas. Treating students as individual human beings with lives beyond the classroom helps shift focus away from the concept of linear or systematic learning in a university environment, which does not match the reality, towards an awareness of a more rhizomatic development (Gale and Parker, 2014). The SEE Award does not have to be completed step by step or in a sequence. Students could, for example, solely do activities in the Culture category for several months, which they feel are worthwhile, before switching to a Community activity for a week. Students are likely to be motivated to engage in this more organic, holistic and personal development.

The SEE framework seeks to certify participation regardless of measurable success and learning outcomes, and is, in its validation process, based on the premise that where there is participation of any kind, there will be learning. Students are incentivised to take part, with greater linguistic and social competence being positive by-products of their cultural participation. The complexity of learning outside the classroom cannot be controlled with pre-set outcomes, and involvement for involvement's sake has its own intrinsic value. Lave and Wenger (1991: 51) put it like this:

> Participation is always based on situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world. This implies that understanding and experience are in constant interaction – indeed, are mutually constitutive. The notion of participation thus dissolves dichotomies between cerebral and embodied activity, between contemplation and involvement, between abstraction and experience: persons, actions, and the world are all implicated in all thought, speech, knowledge and learning.

SEE aims to create positivity within the students' environment as a whole. In other words, if all the student knows is the classroom, it can be difficult to create positive interactive scenarios. For example, a student who is not particularly successful in the second-language classroom might excel on the basketball court. If the student succeeds at a (non-language) skill, the experience of immersion becomes more positive. Saito et al. (2018) have established a link between emotion, motivation and performance, which suggests that lessening anxiety leads to better results. SEE thus validates engagement in social situations where linguistic ability is secondary to other skills, and less emphasis and value is placed on linguistic performance, with the aim of reducing anxiety around perceived inadequacies.

Identity

Lave and Wenger (1991) state that there is probably no such thing as *illegitimate* participation. However, the term draws attention to the fact that some learners may be under the misapprehension that they are excluded from participation. We argue that it could be the case that 'international' students may lack the confidence to fully participate in university life because their own perceived primary identity is as 'learners of English' or 'foreigners'. Creating a sense of awareness of the legitimacy of their participation in activities might overcome barriers to engagement by creating a sense of belonging and a right to belong. At the same time, 'identity, knowing, and social membership entail one another' (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 53), and the SEE Award creates the opportunity for initial social membership and aims to help students create additional, less exclusive identities such as University Badminton Team member. These identities are formed as they move closer to being a full participant of the sociocultural community. Positive labelling can impact a students' perception of themselves, and hence their performance, significantly. Cohen and Garcia (2008: 365) have established a link between identity and performance: in their study, students were labelled as, for example, a 'very good arithmetic student' by their teacher and within weeks, there was a noticeable improvement in performance. The SEE project labels students as people who engage in extracurricular activities, and this identity of someone who joins in or takes part in the environment beyond their classrooms may be adopted by participants. This is desirable in terms of student confidence and making steps toward their sense of belonging at the institution and in the UK.

'International' students may find themselves spending considerable amounts of time with other 'international' students, despite living and studying in the UK. By creating incentives and opportunities for 'international' students to socially interact with 'home' students, these intercultural activities create what Pratt (1991) terms *contact zones*. These are places where the different cultures influence each other through interaction (Pratt, 1991). The SEE Award draws on Street's (1993) assertion that culture is a verb, meaning that it is not something that people have, but rather is something that they do. If we want students to understand the culture of the UK, or of the education institution, then they should *do* them. A culture comprises dynamic subcultures, and by engaging with a number of them through the extracurricular, students can both inform and be informed by them.

By increasing their entanglement with cultures and creating new lines of flight (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), students can psychologically change and adapt. When in the act of going and doing, 'international' students are afforded the possibility of becoming and developing new identities. Ros i Solé et al. (2020) espouse the *vibrant identity*, with its multidimensionality and changing tempos. We encourage messy interactions through which students can develop their identities. The potential realisation of such personal dimensions is facilitated through the opportunities afforded by the SEE Award.

Placing students within a community of practitioners also allows for opportunities for meta-learning, which occurs when there is 'potential for transcendent adaptation' – the processing of crises, problems or challenges of 'urgent subjective importance' (Illeris, 2004: 58). It could be argued that a sense of belonging has to be learned, and that while universities must do their utmost to accommodate individual students from all backgrounds and create opportunities for participation, creating a sense of belonging can only be achieved if the student undergoes 'the simultaneous restructuring of several cognitive as well as emotional schemes. Functionally, it changes the learner's self, thereby providing the learner with qualitatively new understandings and patterns of action' (Illeris, 2004: 59). These legitimised opportunities for meta-learning allow students to 'become aware of and increasingly in control of habits of perception, inquiry, learning, and growth' (Maudsley, 1979: n.p.).

Co-construction

Finally, co-construction constitutes an essential aspect of the SEE Award. Bovill (2020), who uses the term *co-creation*, laments that research into co-creating largely focuses on projects involving participants who are either highly motivated or privileged from the outset. In contrast, the SEE Award actively aims for whole-cohort co-construction and participatory design regardless of initial motivation levels or ability. Students are actively involved in negotiating not only the nature of the activities, but also the form that their evidence of participation takes. As mentioned before, we deliberately accept forms of evidence that do not necessarily depend on English literacy (see the 'Case studies' sections). This means that students can submit almost any evidence that they took part in a stated activity. For example, they could submit a ticket from an event. Thus, we aim to increase access to participation regardless of language proficiency or academic literacy level, while minimising teacher judgement of students' abilities and success. Students are encouraged to negotiate with their SEE adviser regarding what their unique portfolio of extracurricular activities might entail.

The framework also takes full advantage of the student-perceived benefits of co-creation relevant to community and belonging, as established by Bovill (2020): increased confidence, enthusiasm, engagement and motivation; increased ownership, feeling valued, enhanced identity and the creation of a learning community. In systematically implementing co-construction, we deliberately address the four fundamental sets of psychological needs identified by Glasser (1998), namely, belonging, power, freedom and fun for a more empowering, positive learning experience.

Conclusion

The SEE Award was initially created to cater for the needs of a small, specific cohort of pre-undergraduate students at the University of Leeds in terms of creating a sense of belonging and promoting engagement in extracurricular activities. It sought to address the additional challenges our students encountered in becoming part of the wider university and in building positive identities within the student community. While further research on the student response to the SEE Award is required, it has since become clear

that the framework addresses wider issues in the current debate on 'belonging', in particular regarding 'international' students. Kuh (1995, cited in Love and Goodsell Love, 1995: 150) asserts that 'a key step in enhancing student learning outside the classroom is determining if the institution's ethos values holistic approaches to learning and student participation in all aspects of institutional life'. In the increased importance given to 'belonging' as a key concept in successful learning, we recognise 'a shift away from a theory of situated activity in which learning is reified as one kind of activity, and toward a theory of social practice in which learning is viewed as an aspect of all activity' (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 37–8).

In fact, it may be time for us to stop thinking of students as students – constantly judged and assessed – and to take a more holistic approach which considers human beings as inherently constant learners, and learning as an integral process in which conceptual and linguistic lines are blurred. As learning is a 'profoundly reflexive and emotional construct' (Christie et al., 2008: 567), universities must adapt to the emotional experience of their learners and actively invest in initiatives that further this sense of belonging for all students. While there is clear commitment across universities in the UK to actively promote a sense of belonging in their students, the needs of 'international' students have to be catered for, with designated initiatives to overcome the additional obstacles to participation in campus life. The SEE initiative, while aiming to overcome psychological barriers in terms of negative self-stereotyping and confidence, can only be one step in creating a more accessible, open-minded community which accepts standards and criteria of success other than traditional ones.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

The authors declare that research ethics approval for this article was provided by the University of Leeds, Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Cultures Research Ethics Committee (AHC REC).

Consent for publication statement

The authors declare that research participants' informed consent to publication of findings – including photos, videos and any personal or identifiable information – was secured prior to publication.

Conflicts of interest statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the authors during peer review of this article have been made. The authors declare no further conflicts with this article.

References

Ahn, M.Y. (2020) *Students' Sense of Belonging in Higher Education: The impacts of social class, locality and institutional habitus. SRHE Scoping Award 2018 final report.* Accessed 18 June 2023. https://srhe.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/AHNMiyoungReport.pdf.

Ahn, M.Y. and Davis, H.H. (2019) 'Four domains of students' sense of belonging to university'. *Studies in Higher Education*, 45 (3), 622–34. [CrossRef]

Aronsen, J., Fried, C.B. and Good, C. (2002) 'Reducing the effects of stereotype threat on African American college students by shaping theories of intelligence'. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 38 (2), 113–25. [CrossRef]

Baumeister, R.F. and Leary, M.R. (1995) 'The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation'. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117 (3), 497–529. [CrossRef]

Bovill, C. (2020) 'Co-creation in learning and teaching: the case for a whole-class approach in higher education'. *Higher Education*, 79, 1023–37. [CrossRef]

Bransford, J., Stevens, R., Schwartz, D., Meltzoff, A., Pea, R., Roschelle, J. and Vye, N. (2006) 'Learning theories and education: Toward a decade of synergy'. In P. Alexander and P. Winne (eds), *Handbook of Educational Psychology*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 209–44.

Burnett, L. (2007) 'Juggling first year student experiences and institutional changes: An Australian experience'. Paper presented at the 20th International Conference on First Year Experience, Big Island, HI, USA, 9–12 July. Accessed 18 June 2023. https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au/bitstream/handle/10072/32622/51648_1.pdf.

Cardiff Metropolitan University. (n.d.) 'The HEAR – FAQs'. Accessed 30 March 2023. https://www.cardiffmet.ac.uk/registry/Pages/The-HEAR{-}{-}-FAQs.aspx.

Christie, H., Tett, L., Cree, V.E., Hounsell, J. and McCune, V. (2008) '"A real rollercoaster of confidence and emotions": Learning to be a university student'. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33 (5), 567–81. [CrossRef]

Cohen, G.L. and Garcia, J. (2008) 'Identity, belonging, and achievement: A model, interventions, implications'. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 17 (6), 365–9. [CrossRef]

Cureton, D. and Gravestock, P. (2019) '"We belong": Differential sense of belonging and its meaning for different ethnic groups in higher education'. *Compass: Journal of learning and teaching*, 12 (1), 1–17. [CrossRef]

De Sisto, M., Huq, A. and Dickinson, G. (2022) 'Sense of belonging in second-year undergraduate students: The value of extracurricular activities'. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 41 (5), 1727–42. [CrossRef]

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Eccles, J.S., Midgley, C., Wigfield, A., Buchanan, C.M., Reuman, D. and Flanagan, C. (1993) 'Development during adolescence: The impact of stage–environment fit on young adolescents' experiences in schools and in families'. *American Psychologist*, 48 (2), 90–101. [CrossRef]

Farrell, M.A. (2008) 'The Relationship between Extracurricular Activities and Sense of School Belonging among Hispanic Students'. PhD thesis, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR, USA.

Freeman, R. (2017) 'The Relationship between Extracurricular Activities and Academic Achievement'. EdD dissertation, National Louis University, Chicago, IL, USA, 245. Accessed 12 June 2023. https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/diss/245.

Freeman, T.M., Anderman, L.H. and Jensen, J.M. (2007) 'Sense of belonging in college freshmen at the classroom and campus levels'. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 75 (3), 203–20. [CrossRef]

Fuller, A., Hodkinson, H., Hodkinson, P. and Unwin, L. (2005) 'Learning as peripheral participation in communities of practice: A reassessment of key concepts in workplace learning'. *British Educational Research Journal*, 31 (1), 49–68. [CrossRef]

Gale, T. and Parker, S. (2014) 'Navigating change: A typology of student transition in higher education'. *Studies in Higher Education*, 39 (5), 734–53. [CrossRef]

Glasser, W. (1998). *Choice Theory: A new psychology of personal freedom*. New York: HarperCollins.

Guilmette, M., Mulvihill, K., Villemaire-Krajden, R. and Barker, E.T. (2019) 'Past and present participation in extracurricular activities is associated with adaptive self-regulation of goals, academic success, and emotional wellbeing among university students'. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 73, 8–15. [CrossRef]

Hausmann, L.R.M., Ye, F., Schofield, J.W. and Woods, R.L. (2009) 'Sense of belonging and persistence in White and African American first-year students'. *Research in Higher Education*, 50 (7), 649–69. [CrossRef]

Illeris, K. (2004) *The Three Dimensions of Learning*. Gylling: Narayana Press.

King, E.A., McQuarrie, F.A.E. and Brigham, S.M. (2021) 'Exploring the relationship between student success and participation in extracurricular activities'. *SCHOLE: A Journal of Leisure Studies and Recreation Education*, 36 (1–2), 42–58. [CrossRef]

Knifsend, C.A., Camacho-Thompson, D.E., Juvonen, J. and Graham, S. (2018) 'Friends in activities, school-related affect, and academic outcomes in diverse middle schools'. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 47 (6), 1208–20. [CrossRef]

Krause, K.L. and Coates, H. (2008) 'Students' engagement in first-year university'. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 33 (5), 493–505. [CrossRef]

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Love, P.G. and Goodsell Love, A. (1995) *Enhancing Student Learning: Intellectual, social, and emotional integration*. Washington, DC: The George Washington University.

Maudsley, D.B. (1979) 'A theory of meta-learning and principles of facilitation: an organismic perspective'. EdD dissertation, University of Toronto, Canada.

Mulrooney, H.M. and Kelly, A.F. (2020) 'The university campus and a sense of belonging: What do students think?'. *New Directions in the Teaching of Physical Sciences*, 15 (1), 1–12. [CrossRef]

Murphy, M.C. and Zirkel, S. (2015) 'Race and belonging in school: How anticipated and experienced belonging affect choice, persistence, and performance'. *Teachers College Record*, 117 (12), 1–40. [CrossRef]

Nelson, K. and Kift, S. (2005) 'Beyond curriculum reform: Embedding the transition experience'. In A. Brew and C. Asmar, C. (eds), *Proceedings of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) conference, Sydney, Australia, 3–6 July*. Toowoomba: University of Southern Queensland, 225–35. Accessed 18 June 2023. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/27465680.

Pittman, L.D. and Richmond, A. (2007) 'Academic and psychological functioning in late adolescence: The importance of school belonging'. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 75 (4), 270–90. [CrossRef]

Pratt, M.L. (1991) 'Arts of the contact zone'. In *Profession*. New York: MLA, 33–40.

Ros i Solé, C., Fenoulet, J. and Quist, G. (2020) 'Vibrant identities and finding joy in difference'. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 20 (5), 397–407. [CrossRef]

Ryan, R.M. and Deci, E.L. (2000) 'Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being'. *American Psychologist*, 55 (1), 68–78. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Saito, K., Dewaele., J., Abe, M. and In'nami, Y. (2018) 'Motivation, emotion, learning experience, and second language comprehensibility development in classroom settings: A cross-sectional and longitudinal study'. *Language Learning*, 68 (3), 709–43. [CrossRef]

Strayhorn, T.L. (2018) *College Students' Sense of Belonging: A key to educational success for all students*, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

Street, B. (1993) 'Culture is a verb: Anthropological aspects of language and cultural process'. In D. Graddol, L. Thompson and M. Byram (eds), *Language and Culture*. Clevedon: British Studies in Applied Linguistic/Multilingual Matters, 22–43.

Tinto, V. (2012) *Completing College: Rethinking institutional action*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

University of Essex. (n.d.) 'Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)'. Accessed 30 March 2023. https://www.essex.ac.uk/student/awards-and-achievements/hear.

University of Leeds. (2023) 'Leeds for life'. Accessed 30 March 2023. https://students.leeds.ac.uk/info/1000058/leeds_for_life.

University of Westminster. (n.d.) 'Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)'. Accessed 30 March 2023. https://www.westminster.ac.uk/current-students/employability-and-career-development/.

Walton, G.M. and Cohen, G.L. (2007) 'A question of belonging: Race, social fit, and achievement'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92 (1), 82–96. [CrossRef]

Walton, G.M. and Cohen, G.L. (2011) 'A brief social-belonging intervention improves academic and health outcomes of minority students'. *Science*, 331 (6023), 1447–51. [CrossRef] [PubMed]