The Theories, Contexts, and Multiple Pedagogies of Engaged Learning

What Succeeds and Why?

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Ask higher education faculty and administrators to define engaged learning—as I have at many colleges and universities I’ve visited as part of my work with the Bringing Theory to Practice Project—and the response is often, “We don’t know exactly how to define it—but we know it when we see it.” For those of us involved in the higher education enterprise, our descriptions of engaged and disengaged students prove that we do indeed know what “it” looks like: Engaged students ask intelligent and probing questions; they integrate what they learn from class discussions and reading into well-crafted course assignments; they effectively collaborate with their peers both in class and in campus leadership positions they hold; and they have a clear sense of the value of their college experience in crafting a meaningful career and life. By way of contrast, we typically describe our disengaged students as slumped over in their chairs on the verge of sleep, either because they spent the previous night partying or because they’ve been locked in their rooms chatting on Facebook into the wee hours (certainly their lethargy is not attributable to our enthralling efforts to educate them!). Even more troublesome are those students whose names are on our class, advising, or residence hall rosters, but we have no idea where—or perhaps most importantly, who—they are. We assume they are “lost” in the myriad of temptations offered by college life or are floundering, directionless, in an existential limbo between adolescence and adulthood.

The fact that most of us in academe—across departments, divisions, and institutions—can describe in similar terms what engaged learning looks like is significant, because we have a shared sense of what “higher” learning, and by way of implication “higher” education, should be about. We agree it’s more than accumulation of academic concepts or skill development for a career, although these have an appropriate place in a
college education; engaged learning, however, is somehow transcendent, evidenced by deep involvement in one’s learning process and in actively and purposefully shaping one’s life direction. And it is the polar opposite of missing class as a result of alcohol or drug use—something to which nearly a third of college students attest.\(^1\) So we have engagement as a shared goal, and even if we can’t crisply define it, we do know it when we see it.

But therein lies a problem, upon which we might find a second area of agreement—we don’t see it as often as we would like. Excepting the few students each semester who tend to be on the verge of burnout (also known as overengagement) in both their learning and campus involvement, we are generally dissatisfied with the engagement level of our students. Some of this disengagement is attributable to factors beyond our control: in addition to being less prepared for college work than their predecessors, today’s students are “coming to college overwhelmed and more damaged than those of previous years” as evidenced by the sharp rise in psychological services over the past two decades.\(^2\) But to attribute all of students’ disengagement to these factors is problematic in two ways: First, it leaves us as educators feeling largely powerless; and second, it contradicts those experiences we have of genuinely influencing students in their learning (e.g., when we provide mentorship to at-risk students, and as a result students become perceptibly more engaged and more successful in their learning). So while we perceive disengagement from learning as a reasonably widespread problem, we wish more students were (healthily) engaged in their learning and college life. And we hope, sometimes against hope, that we might have a role to play in encouraging this engagement.

In light of these areas of consensus—a shared sense of what it means to be engaged in one’s learning, and a desire to help our students become more engaged in that learning—the goals of this chapter are twofold. First will be to frame our collective observations and intuitive understanding of engaged learning in terms of learning theory, from the fields of both higher and adult education research—thus hoping to attempt to answer the question “What is engaged learning?” through the lens of theory and research. The second goal is to try to move beyond our assumptions about the causes of student disengagement to examine known “best practices” for encouraging engaged learning. In doing so, we move in the spirit of “as far as depends on you”\(^3\)—or taking up our end of the educational bargain. Perhaps the degree to which we are intentional about creating contexts for engaged learning will determine how much we actually see it, which is the central thesis of the Bringing Theory to Practice Project.
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Dimensions of Engaged Learning

If there is uncertainty about what is meant by engaged learning among college educators, there is likewise a lack of a crystallized definition among theorists and researchers. Yet, a great deal of literature in the fields of higher and adult education describes various dimensions that enrich, deepen, and intensify students’ learning. While they are not discrete and often transact with each other, there are four such major dimensions: the developmental dimension (fostering intellectual complexity); the holistic dimension (encompassing multiple domains in learning—e.g., cognitive, personal, and social); the integrative dimension (integrating types, sources, and temporality of learning); and the contextual dimension (promoting interdependence and engagement in community). Each of these dimensions, when activated in a learning setting, has the potential to make a student’s learning experience transformational in nature—which, put simply, means that students are never the same (in a good way!) as a result of their learning. Put less simply, educational settings that activate these dimensions not only facilitate gains in knowledge, real-world application of learning, and intellectual complexity but also harness these gains to help learners progress toward what Keyes describes as “flourishing” (emotional, psychological, and social well-being). When these dimensions converge in educational practice, they facilitate the transformational experiences we might consider engaged learning.

The Developmental Dimension

During the college years, students experience fundamental shifts in their perceptions of self and others. Changes in these areas have profound implications for the ways students make meaning of their learning and experiences as well as their functioning in relationship to other individuals and to society. These transformations are along the lines of what psychologists call developmental change, in which challenges in the environment cause individuals to move toward new—and generally more complex—ways of being in the world.

Pioneering the theory and research on college student development, Perry found that as students become more capable of recognizing and incorporating diverse perspectives into their worldviews, they in turn develop increasingly complex ways of thinking, knowing, and making meaning. Through the positions of Perry’s model, or “scheme,” students move from a dualistic worldview that endorses simplified either/or thinking to a recognition of multiple and potentially valid perspectives, and then to a
contextually relative approach to judging the adequacy of these differing perspectives. This developmental path is foundational in the work of Belenky et al., who describe women's development in terms of increasingly complex ways of knowing and understanding self. In this view, students shift from relying on external authorities for self-knowledge to recognizing themselves as authorities and finally to reconstructing knowledge generated both external to and within the self. Similar development is also described by King and Kitchener, who examine how students learn to comprehend and address the complexity inherent in ill-structured problems, and is echoed in work by Baxter-Magolda, who focuses on how students develop a more complex sense of knowledge and self. Still other theorists have used a similar developmental arc to examine areas such as moral development, faith development, racial identity development, and response to multiculturalism and difference.

Key to the developmental dimension is the balancing of what Sanford called “challenge” and “support” in the educational environment. Such a balance encourages developmental movement toward complexity in cognition, whereas imbalance can result in what Perry identified as developmental “pause” or even “retreat.” In light of this need, Knefelkamp conceptualized a model of developmental instruction variables based on Perry's work in order to, as Knefelkamp states, “understand the underlying characteristics of the student-as-learner so that we could design instructional environments that were characterized by a balance of intellectual challenges and supports.” According to Knefelkamp, cognitive development can be fostered by titrating four environmental variables to learners' developmental needs: the level of diversity experienced; the amount of structure provided; the amount and type of experiential learning; and the level of personalism (or the degree of respectfulness, of collaboration, and of connection made between content and students' lives). Thus, student learning, development, and meaning making can be directly facilitated by the conditions of a given learning context, particularly by the balancing of developmental challenge and support.

The Holistic Dimension

While the academic and vocational realms remain the focus of much of higher education, and research confirms that most college students experience substantial gains in these areas, change during the college years is not limited to these realms. Learning that is engaged intentionally crisscrosses the cognitive, affective, psychosocial, and behavioral domains, thereby encompassing multiple aspects of the self. This kind of learning is not limited to an acquisition of specific content or mastery of a set of
skills; rather, it is holistic in that it engages the learner’s capacities for understanding, feeling, relating, and action.

One of the most widely read theorists of college student experience and development, Chickering provides a thorough cataloging of psychosocial change in college through seven vectors, or “major constellations of development during adolescence and early adulthood”: developing intellectual, physical, and interpersonal competence; managing emotions; moving through autonomy toward interdependence; developing mature interpersonal relationships; establishing identity; developing purpose; and developing integrity. While it may be hard to imagine a psychosocial domain that does not find its place among these vectors, Chickering’s theory offers more than an organizing principle; rather, it offers a kind of holistic map of potential areas for personal growth and development in college.

It is true that students cover a good deal of this map’s terrain simply as a result of attending college; personal growth and development are spurred on for residential students, for example, by being removed from familiar home surroundings and having to live communally in a residence hall with diverse strangers (as we’ve all witnessed, this can be quite the psychosocial challenge for an eighteen-year-old!). Yet many educators, particularly those in student affairs divisions, have found that intentionally planning and programming with these vectors in mind can make not only for highly effective programs but also significant student learning. It also offers a means of consciously balancing developmental challenges and supports so that students do not become overwhelmed (in the aforementioned example, a learning community structure with mentoring and reflective discussion opportunities might provide the support the residential student needs to succeed in the transition to college life). Likewise, faculty can structure the classroom environment for holistic learning by incorporating activities that encompass the cognitive, affective, psychosocial, and behavioral domains—for example, through research projects that also incorporate reflective journaling, group collaboration, and off-campus application of learning, respectively. While this requires intentionality and effort on the part of faculty, students consistently report in the research that holistic learning experiences—those that enable them to both learn and apply that learning toward their personal development—are the most impactful.

The Integrative Dimension

While the holistic dimension refers to the incorporation of multiple domains of self in learning, the integrative dimension deals directly with the
Engaged learning involves the integration of multiple types of learning acquired in and through varied sources of learning. It also entails the integration of immediate learning with past learning, all of which serves as the foundation for future lifelong learning. The integrative dimension thus helps students build a latticework of meaning making across learning types, sources, and temporality.

In a Deweyan sense, engaged learning is active and involves ongoing experimentation rather than just passive absorption of information. When learning is active, the nature of students’ educational experiences—as well as what they do with those experiences—becomes critical. Based on the work of Dewey as well as Piaget and Lewin, Kolb’s model of experiential learning offers a way of understanding how various learning processes can be integrated to help students learn from experience. The model depicts four such processes—experience, reflection, integration, and application of knowledge—as arranged in an iterative cycle: “[Students] must be able to involve themselves fully, openly, and without bias in new experiences . . . to reflect on and observe their experiences from many perspectives . . . to create concepts that integrate their observations into logically sound theories . . . [and] to use these theories to make decisions and solve problems.”

Certainly, diverse learning sources—such as the classroom, online learning platforms, laboratories, practicum experiences, and so forth—provide rich opportunities for the operation of this cycle as opposed to a singular site of learning (e.g., the traditional lecture hall). Students must have chances to engage in what Hutchings and Wutzdorff call the “dialectic” between “knowing” a subject of study and actually “doing” the subject (e.g., through lab experiments, a biology student comes to understand photosynthesis not only as an abstract concept but also as a concrete process).

This dialectic also involves the integration of knowledge gained from others (e.g., faculty who share their expertise) as well as knowledge gained through self-directed study or collaborative learning with peers.

Thus through the dialectic of knowing and experience, mediated by reflection, students come to integrate their learning on an ongoing basis into more complex and complete understandings. One significant challenge to this process in the college setting is the bounding of most learning experiences by the beginning and end of a semester (with the notable exception of cross-semester experiences, such as first-year learning communities or capstone courses). We do not need research (only our own experiences as learners) to tell us that our students’ learning is not that discrete or linear. This is particularly important as several theorists, such as Schön and Mezirow, highlight the critical role of reflection in learning—and reflection is a process that requires both intentionality and time.
intentionally structured experiences that are sufficient in duration, new learning can serve as the basis for future experimentation; critical reflection on that experimentation can occur; and students can craft new, resultant ways of being and doing in the world. The integrative dimension thus leads to a rich, developing knowledge base in which to live—and continue to learn—in the world.

The Contextual Dimension

In discussing the developmental, holistic, and integrative learning of individual students, we mustn’t forget that an individual’s learning does not happen in a vacuum. Rather, learning requires engagement with social contexts (whether the classroom, laboratory, residence hall, or community) in collaboration with faculty mentors, peer groups, supervisors, and many others. When these social contexts are harnessed and shaped for learning, students can come to understand the interdependence of self and society, engage in the construction of shared meaning, and negotiate for action that benefits the common good.

Learning is a “fundamentally social phenomenon reflecting our own deeply social nature as human beings” that occurs within the context of multiple communities in which students are situated, according to Wenger. Communities such as colleges and universities, as well as those that lie beyond the campus gates, are places where students “develop, negotiate, and share” the ways they understand the world. Participation in these communities shapes not only students’ meaning making but also their behaviors and their sense of identity. This participation involves a dynamic “negotiation” process between the environment and the individual, and to this end Wenger asserts that educators need “inventive ways of engaging students in meaningful practices,” which entails “involving them in actions, discussions, and reflections that make a difference to the communities that they value.”

By coming to see themselves in relation to larger contexts, and by thoughtfully and critically aligning their actions and identities within those contexts, students gain skills needed for community membership. They learn interdependence between self and others. This is critical in the immediate college environment as well as the broader communities in which students will find themselves throughout their lives. Intentionally engaging students in these communities prior to graduation (through structured experiences such as service learning) can help students develop a commitment to civic engagement, which Jacoby describes as “a heightened sense of responsibility to one’s communities . . . and [to] benefiting the common good.” In this way, the contextual dimension of learning
fosters capacities for democratic participation and lifelong engagement in community.

Engaged Learning Pedagogy

For engaged learning to involve these four dimensions—the developmental, holistic, integrative, and contextual—it likewise requires pedagogies that foster intellectual complexity, encompass multiple domains of self, integrate diverse learning processes and sources, and foster interdependence in and commitment to community. Yet, engaged learning pedagogy is fundamentally different from much of the teaching and learning that occurs in academe, as Edgerton explains:

The dominant mode of teaching and learning in higher education [is] “teaching as telling; learning as recall.” . . . This mode of instruction fails to help students acquire two kinds of learning that are now crucial to their individual success and critically needed by our society at large. The first is real understanding. The second is “habits of the heart” that motivate students to be caring citizens. Both of these qualities are acquired through pedagogies that elicit intense engagement.20

Such engaged pedagogies, while not yet normative in higher education, have gained some traction over the past two decades—which is to say they are receiving increased attention both in practice and research. Kuh identifies a number of such high-impact practices that tend to foster student engagement in learning, such as service learning, first-year seminars, learning communities, undergraduate research, and capstone courses and projects (still other examples of engaged learning pedagogies are community-based research, collaborative learning, problem-based learning, intergroup dialogue, and internships).21 These pedagogies can be considered engaged because they tend to foster complexity in students’ thinking, feeling, relating, and acting (developmental and holistic dimensions) as well as create connections between students’ learning experiences and with social contexts and communities (integrative and contextual dimensions).

For the purposes of this chapter, three of these pedagogies—service learning, learning communities, and undergraduate research—are discussed, along with a summary of their known outcomes (as described by Brownell and Swaner in their analysis of research on these pedagogies).22 Although the body of research on these and similar pedagogies is relatively new and is methodologically limited, it provides suggestive evidence that the pedagogies contribute positively to the four dimensions of engaged learning.23 Finally, moderating variables—defined by Swaner
and Brownell as “those factors unique to each practice which impact outcomes”—are outlined for each pedagogy, as certain formulations, structures, or emphases in each appear to make for more successful student learning experiences.24

Service Learning

Benson and Harkavy describe service learning—a pedagogy that integrates community-based service experience with classroom learning and reflection—as one of “a handful of creative, active pedagogies . . . that enhance a student’s capacity to think critically, problem solve, and function as a citizen in a democratic society.”25 Similarly, Jacoby explains: “Service-learning is a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development.”26 This type of integrative service learning has been implemented in a wide range of academic disciplines and professional fields and is generally offered for academic credit, though the length of these experiences may vary.

As implied by its name, service learning involves a reciprocal relationship between the activities of service and learning. In regard to service, students are generally involved in nonpaid work in a community setting, whether on a local, national, or global level. Examples of service learning sites include early literacy programs, Head Start centers, homeless shelters, immigrant centers, community health clinics, or legal aid agencies; regardless of the setting, the more relevant the service to the student’s course work, the more meaningful the learning experience.27 Zlotkowski explains that in contrast to “traditional cocurricular volunteerism,” service learning is integrated within the academic enterprise with the aim to “promote faculty involvement and to establish a reliable curricular base.”28 Practically speaking, this means faculty articulate the rationale, purpose, and learning goals of service activities as well as ensure that the specific tasks of service are relevant to these goals. In terms of course activities, much of the service learning literature points to structured opportunities for reflection (such as journal writing and group discussion) as the hallmarks of the pedagogy. Reflection enables students to make intentional connections between their classroom learning and their service experiences.

In a review of higher education research, Brownell and Swaner found that participation in service learning benefited students academically (in terms of higher grades, higher persistence rates, and higher levels of academic engagement) as well as across the four dimensions of engaged learning. In terms of the developmental dimension, research indicates
student gains in critical thinking, writing skills, and moral reasoning as accompanying service learning participation. From a holistic dimension, students engaged in service learning experience greater interaction with faculty and report increases in social responsibility. Service learning also leads to greater application of course learning, indicative of gains in the integrative dimension. And finally, in terms of the contextual dimension, service learning participation is correlated with greater levels of civic behavior, understanding of social justice, sense of self-efficacy, tolerance, and commitment to a service-oriented career. The positive gains of service learning participation appeared to be mediated by characteristics of both the service experience (quantity of hours and direct service contact; quality of supervision) and the learning experience (opportunities for reflection; the degree to which faculty connected course material with the service experience).

Learning Communities

Learning communities generally involve a group of students who share common classes and/or cocurricular experiences, but they vary greatly from campus to campus in terms of the number of linked classes, the incorporation of a residential component, and the use of a thematic focus (e.g., environmental conservation, social justice). Additionally, the duration of participation in learning communities can vary by campus; some experiences may be a semester long, while others can extend over a single or multiple academic years. For example, Tinto and Goodsell describe first-year interest groups that operate on a learning community model and facilitate connections with peers and faculty for new students (thus first-year seminars, depending on their structure, may be considered a subtype of learning communities). Pascarella and Terenzini explain that regardless of their particular formulation, “the purpose of structured learning communities is to facilitate active over passive learning, collaboration and cooperation as opposed to competition, and community instead of isolation.” Learning communities achieve this through shared or collaborative learning (enrollment of the same group of students in common courses) and connected learning (organization of learning around a theme or large topic). Thus, learning communities not only utilize engaged pedagogies but also institutionalize them in the collegiate structure.

In their analysis of higher education research, Brownell and Swaner identified a range of positive effects of learning community participation. These included gains in academic indicators (higher grades, higher persistence rates, higher levels of academic engagement) as well as across each of the dimensions of engaged learning, including developmental (self-report
of critical thinking gains, gains in intellectual development, gains in writing and reading skills); holistic (greater interaction with faculty and peers, perception of campus as more supportive, ease of college transition); integrative (higher levels of assimilating information and making connections among classes); and contextual (greater appreciation for and engagement with diversity and different viewpoints, higher rate of civic engagement). These gains appear to be moderated by several variables, including the intensity of the learning community experience (e.g., the number of linked courses and whether a residential component is included) as well as the degree of positive student and faculty interaction.

Undergraduate Research

Kinkead explains that undergraduate research “is defined broadly to include scientific inquiry, creative activity, and scholarship.”31 Depending on the discipline, undergraduate research can range from laboratory investigation, to development of an artistic portfolio, to the creation and evaluation of a community outreach program. Undergraduate research opportunities are generally structured in nature and are often sponsored or administrated by a student’s major department. Some institutions have undergraduate research centers or may house related programs within broader teaching and learning centers. Regardless of where these research opportunities are situated, a faculty mentor plays a crucial role in guiding students’ research—from the selection of a topic, to conducting the research, to disseminating the results (often through a conference presentation or publication). Nationally speaking, the majority of formalized undergraduate research opportunities have been extended to students in the sciences, to students of color, to academically disadvantaged students, and to honors students.

As a pedagogy, undergraduate research is fundamentally different from traditional forms of learning in the academy. This is underscored by the Boyer Commission’s report, Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America’s Research Universities, which describes the learning in undergraduate research as “based on discovery guided by mentoring rather than on the transmission of information,” thereby representing a “profound change in the way undergraduate teaching is structured.”32 In such a model, undergraduates are responsible for cocreating knowledge through the process of inquiry, as opposed to receiving, memorizing, and re-presenting knowledge from faculty experts.

One subtype of undergraduate research is community-based research, which, as Strand et al. describe, is a unique “partnership of students, faculty, and community members who collaboratively engage in research
with the purpose of solving a pressing community problem or effecting social change.” Where community-based research differs from undergraduate research is that it considers students as equal partners with faculty and community members on the research team. Students are empowered in their learning to think critically about community concerns; to engage in collaborative problem solving; and to design, implement, and evaluate real-world solutions. The final “products” of community-based research differ from traditional undergraduate research as well, in that they are collaborative and are of direct benefit to the community (e.g., a team of faculty, students, and community members develops a health and wellness program and together conduct an evaluation of its efficacy).

Compared to service learning and learning communities, the research on learning outcomes of undergraduate research—including community-based research—is minimal. Brownell and Swaner did find evidence of academic gains related to undergraduate research participation, such as higher rate of persistence, higher rate of graduate school enrollment, and improvement in research skills. Some developmental gains were also identified in the research, such as increases in problem solving and critical thinking. In terms of the contextual dimension, students who participated in undergraduate research experienced increased interaction with faculty and peers and a greater sense of connectedness to the academic enterprise (not surprisingly, the two moderating variables identified in the literature were the role of the faculty mentor and the quality of the mentoring relationship). One might speculate that participating in undergraduate research would help students integrate their learning from their course work and the research experience, and that activities such as community-based research would yield gains similar to service learning (e.g., increases in civic engagement); these remain, however, areas in need of research.

Creating Cultures of Engagement

Although further research on the outcomes of engaged learning pedagogies is needed, we can confidently say they show promise in promoting gains across the four dimensions of engaged learning. This is not to forget that students also demonstrate gains in the traditional academic outcomes, such as grade point average and persistence to the degree. Yet despite this potential, few students across all of American higher education have the opportunity to participate in engaged learning settings, as they are offered on a limited and elective basis on most campuses. Furthermore, those students who are able to participate may do so only once during college, which itself is problematic as Eyler and Giles explain: “The learning
goals in higher education are complex, and students are affected by many of life’s experiences; no single intervention, particularly over the course of a semester, can be expected to have a dramatic impact on student outcomes."

If the added value of these pedagogies to higher education writ large is limited by their isolated use and duration, the question becomes how to increase student engagement in systematic ways. Certainly as individual or small groups of educators have opportunity to implement engaged learning pedagogies, the benefit accrues to each successive student who participates (thus, we shouldn’t “despise the day of small beginnings”). From a field-level perspective, we also might view individual engaged learning efforts throughout higher education as weights that, with continual stacking, will eventually bring academe to the “tipping point”—where engaged pedagogies move from the periphery to the center in the ways faculty “teach” and students “learn” in higher education.

There is, however, another approach we might consider. If we understand learning to be the result of interaction between the individual learner and the specific learning environment, we can view this process in terms of mutually shaping “transactions” as suggested by Bandura’s concept of reciprocal determinism. The learning environment and students within are continually, and reciprocally, engaged with each other. It follows that employing the dimensions of engaged learning in these transactions is more likely to occur and be maximized through the intentional design of learning environments. By contrast, an environment that is unintentional or “piecemeal” in its approach to student learning would likely fail to harness its transactional potential for engaged learning or leave the process largely up to chance.

Most colleges and universities have engagement as a priority in their institutional mission statements, but it requires intentionality, diplomacy, and (for lack of a better term) grit to translate engagement into the dominant models of teaching and learning at colleges and universities. By shifting engaged pedagogy—and as important, its philosophical base—from the periphery to the center of educational practice, institutions move toward establishing what I have termed cultures of engagement that can harness the full promise of engaged learning.

Kuh and Whitt define cultures in higher education as “patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that shape the behavior of individuals and groups in a college or university and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off the campus.” Applying this definition, a culture of engagement would involve establishing engaged learning as (1) a normative experience for students; (2) a shared value among members of the campus community; (3) a common practice
across all sites of learning; and (4) an affirmed belief and assumption in the curriculum and cocurriculum.

Such a reordering would have profound implications for the frame of reference with which all members of the campus community view education and its purposes. And specific engaged pedagogies—such as service learning, learning communities, and undergraduate research—would shift from exceptions in teaching and learning to the building blocks for these cultures of engagement. There appear to be some colleges and universities that have already experienced success along these lines; for example, Kuh et al. name twenty institutions that are highly effective in terms of promoting student engagement,39 and Colby et al. identify twelve institutions as “building moral and civic education into the heart of their undergraduates’ learning.”40 These colleges and universities are working to make engaged pedagogy, in Edgerton’s words, “part of their overall institutional identity.”41

If we understand the core purposes of higher education as transcending unidimensional academic knowledge and transferable skills to encompass students’ full development as individuals, then at each level of academe we must actively attend to students’ intellectual and personal development, to their overall well-being, to their crafting an integrative foundation for lifelong learning and action, and to their capacity for living committed and purposeful lives in community. To this end, we need to encourage the expansion of engaged learning pedagogies and corresponding research on their efficacy, but we also must work toward building cultures of engagement across higher education, thereby harnessing the full potential of engaged learning.

Notes


22. Jayne E. Brownell and Lynn E. Swaner, Five High-Impact Practices: Research on Learning Outcomes, Completion, and Quality (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2010). Note that this review of the literature also includes an analysis of known learning outcomes for underserved students; where available, research on engaged learning experiences generally indicates academic and personal gains for these students.

23. It should be noted that while the research generally shows positive gains for students who participate in these engaged learning pedagogies, Swaner and Brownell identified “substantial limitations” to this research: Most studies were descriptive in nature, involved only a single institution, did not control for selection bias or utilize adequate comparison groups, were short-term studies versus longitudinal, and involved self-report versus direct measures of outcomes. Thus the evidence described for each pedagogy is “moderate” and in need of further confirmation through systematic research that addresses these issues.


Pedagogy (/ˈpɛdəɡədʒi, -ɡoʊdʒi, -ɡɒɡi/), most commonly understood as the approach to teaching, refers to the theory and practice of learning, and how this process influences, and is influenced by, the social, political and psychological development of learners. Pedagogy, taken as an academic discipline, is the study of how knowledge and skills are imparted in an educational context, and it considers the interactions that take place during learning. Both the theory and practice of pedagogy vary greatly.