ENGAGED LEARNING IN THE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Engaged learning is a benchmark for success in today's university. However, most universities are struggling with implementation of engaged learning. This study investigated engaged learning—specifically, what is required to implement successful engaged learning in the university? A previous study used a qualitative methodology (grounded theory) which identified concept/theories for engaged learning. They were: learning strategies (pedagogy), virtual/physical space, technology, support, engaged learners, engaged facilitators, and institutional integration. Specific themes emerged in each theory. Engaged Learning in the University used a quantitative methodology to gather and analyze data from administrators, faculty, students, and support personnel about these theories and themes.

Keywords: engaged/digital learning, learning strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Engaged learning is a must for the 21st century universities. Traditional learning strategies are not successful for the emerging challenges of the technology age [2]. Universities must provide a high-quality education that allows learners to discover new ways of getting information, transforming knowledge and constructing meaningful learning [12].

Educators need to utilize creative learning strategies suitable for today's 21st century learners. The digital revolution has the capability to promote effective learning and student engagement and the social process has expanded the educational landscape by encouraging students to exchange ideas, explore new knowledge, collaborate on ideas, and generate mutual understanding [18] [7] [9].

Studies show that well-designed learning environments play an important role in motivating students [17] [6] [8]. Student engagement is ever-present in discussions about higher education policy, in research literature, and even in the non-academic media. A large research project in the UK found that student engagement is so prominent because it unequivocally connects with student success [16].

While the number of publications about engaged learning were great, and the topics included were numerous, the understanding and clarity of the big picture about the engaged learner, and the engaged learning environment is minimal if not non-existent. Much of the literature is anecdotal and focuses on faculty, programs, or challenges of design and implementation [10].

The millennial generation has its own nuances that require professors to use new teaching strategies [11]. University students in the millennial generation are bored and uninspired in many of today's classrooms [5]. Proserpio and Gioia report a lack of compatibility between the learning styles of 21st

century students and the teaching styles of their professors [15]. Various authors [8] [13] [15] [17] claim that teacher-oriented lectures are commonly used in higher education for content delivery.

In order to thrive in the 21st century, higher education must adopt new approaches to move engagement from the margin to the mainstream of its research, teaching, and service. To become fully embedded into the central core of the institution, engagement must be scholarly; cut across the missions of teaching, research, and service [3].

While it has become increasingly clear that 'success' means helping all students become more engaged learners, thus improving their academic outcomes and their progression opportunities after graduation. What is not increasingly clear is what universities need to do to become engaged. What is the process? What are the tools and techniques? Who is involved? This study investigated Engaged Learning in the University.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A previous study used Grounded Theory, a qualitative methodology and identified emerging concept/theories for successful engaged learning. The following theories were identified: well-designed learning strategies (pedagogy), appropriate virtual and physical space, value-added technology, extensive support, engaged learners, engaged facilitators, and institutional integration.

Figure 1- Engaged Learning Theories
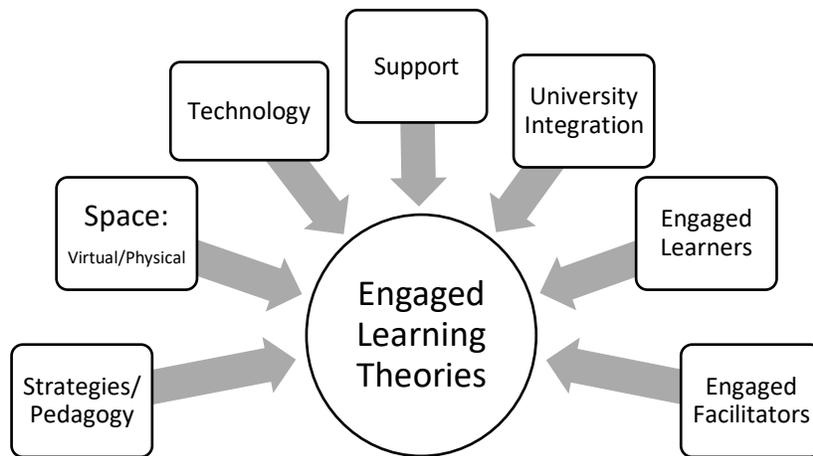
The seven theories were tested in Engaged Learning in the University. Through a survey, thirty-five Administrators, thirty Support Personnel, thirty-five Facilitators, and ninety-eight Learners were asked to report their perceived relevance of each theme and theory and rank the importance of the themes and the theories. Follow-up interviews were conducted to gain more in-depth information.

Data was initially gathered through a survey that asked the perceived relevance to engaged learning of the emergent theories: well-designed learning strategies (pedagogy), appropriate virtual and physical space, value-added technology, comprehensive support, engaged learners, engaged facilitators, and institutional integration.

T_1 How relevant are well-designed learning strategies to engaged learning?
T_2 How relevant are appropriate virtual/physical spaces to engaged learning?
T_3 How relevant is value-added technology to engaged learning?
T_4 How relevant is comprehensive support to engaged learning?
T_5 How relevant are engaged facilitators to engaged learning?
T_6 How relevant are engaged learners to engaged learning?
T_7 How relevant is institutional integration to engaged learning?

Strategies Themes: Course Design, Goals and Objectives, Traditional/Hybrid/Flipped/Online, Syllabus, Assessment, and Tools and Techniques. Tools and Techniques included: Project-Based Learning, Relevant Learning, Active Learning, Collaborative Learning, Simulations, Virtual Reality, Inquiry Based Learning. Service Learning, Associative Learning, Convergent Thinking, Divergent thinking, Discovery Learning. Incidental Learning, Reflective Learning, Transformative Learning, Visualization, Workplace Learning, Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, and Augmented Reality.

Space—Virtual or Physical Themes: presentations space, break out space, discussion areas, team/group areas, collaborative areas, cloud storage, Wi-Fi access, appropriate software and appropriate hardware.

Support Themes: support from colleagues, departments, faculty development, LMS technicians, campus technicians, publisher technicians.

Facilitator Themes: enthusiastic, willing to learn, technology savvy, willing to change, willing to give up the old ways, and uses engaged learning strategies.

Learner Themes. Think, listen, question, seek help, participate collaborate, communicate, challenge ideas, exert their best effort, are technology savvy, are higher order thinkers, use Metacognitive strategies, are enthusiastic about learning, are responsible for their learning and show a sustained behavioral involvement in their classes.

Institutional Integration Themes: strategic plans of the university, colleges, departments, faculty, information technology, and facilities. Resource planning. Financial assistance, time for training, materials, software, hardware and other items.

DATA ANALYSIS
It is anticipated that this study will be completed in March of 2019.

FINDINGS/CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS
It is anticipated that this study will be completed in March of 2019.

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