

Chapter 10

Active Learning Strategies in Enhancing Learning among College Students

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the relationship between active learning strategies and skills and attributes that enhance learning (SAEL) among college students. Developing skills and attributes that enhance learning (SAEL) among college students is critical to student success and persistence in college. Additionally, SAEL help the students develop a sustained learning commitment while in college and after graduation. However, little evidence is there to show how higher education institutions are equipping students with SAEL. This study seeks to investigate if there is a relationship between active learning strategies (ALS) and SAEL. Secondary data from the 2007 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) at a Midwestern state university in the USA were employed to examine the relationship between ALS and SAEL. The results of the analysis showed positive significant correlations between ALS and SAEL components, ($p < 0.001$). Multiple regression model showed that ALS predictor variables significantly predict SAEL, $R^2 = .196$, $R^2_{adj} = .188$, $F(7, 731) = 25.38$, $p < .001$. The regression model accounts for 19.6% of variance in SAEL.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8363-1.ch010

INTRODUCTION

Facilitating the development of skills and attributes that enhance learning is critical to rewarding student learning experiences and success in college. As much as higher education institutions admit students to their institutions, ensuring student success in these institutions is crucial. As such, helping students learn and develop skills and attributes that enhance learning (SAEL) is important. Higher education institutions have a task of ensuring that students have what it takes to fully and meaningfully participate in higher education learning experiences. Some of the college experiences that can nurture and develop SAEL include student involvement in active learning strategies (ALS) like class discussion, group work, asking questions in class, and student-teacher interactions. Cropley (1981) and Knapper and Cropley (2000) have identified skills and attributes crucial to student learning to include: computing and information technology skills; critical thinking, quantitative and analytical skills; learning effectively on your own; and working effectively with others. It is important to ensure that students acquire these skills so as to have a productive learning experience in college and in their careers.

Learning today requires an effective use of computing and information technology. As such, learners should be techno-literate in order to effectively and successfully participate in the learning process (Bryce, Frigo, McKenzie & Withers, 2002; Bryce & Wither, 2003). In addition critical thinking and analytical skills are important to meaningful student learning. Students should be taught how to utilize reason, evidence, problem solve, and make logical decisions. Teaching thinking skills to students is paramount in helping them be actively engaged in learning as well as in the acquisition of lifelong learning skills. Thinking skills can also improve students' achievement,

help students develop positive self-concept, and develop habits necessary for productive citizenship (Beyer, 1988; Bryce & Wither, 2003; Knox, Lindsay, & Kolb, 1993).

Framework

Self-determined learning theory focuses on interaction between engagement, adjustment and learning. The theory predicts that "learning will maximize when engagement produces optimal adjustments to new challenges" (Mithaug, Mithaug, Agran, Martin & Wehmeyer, 2003, p. 3). The theory as noted is supported when the learners believe that their "opportunities for gaining something from a situation are valuable and manageable and when they know how to regulate their expectations, choice, and action to produce results they expect from circumstance" (Mithaug, et.al., 2003, p. 3). Students become self-determined as they acquire knowledge and skills necessary to deal with a situation, gain control over the situation, and develop a belief that "gain from the situation will give them more of what they need and want to know" (Mithaug, et.al., 2003, p. 3). Self-determined learning theory help students engage in situation they believe is valuable to them by regulating their expectations, choices, and actions in order to produce satisfactory results. Students' perceptions and beliefs will influence those students' engagement, adjustments, and learning. It is therefore important to help students embrace sustained learning commitment by conveying to them importance of this disposition and teaching them how to regulate their expectations, choices, and actions for meaningful learning.

Statement of the Problem

Even though we expect students to learn and succeed in college, little attention has been given to understanding factors that promote development

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