

Engaged Learning

The phrase “engaged learning” broadly indicates any situation in which students actively participate in their own acquisition of knowledge or skill. Collaborative learning methods such as problem-based or project-based learning can be identified as engaged learning, among other pedagogical practices such as increasing the frequency of instructor feedback, incorporating writing across the curriculum, and establishing learning communities. Therefore, engaged learning is not specifically linked to any single instructional approach but refers to:

- active learning (engagement in the learning process),
- experiential learning (engagement with the object of study),
- multi/interdisciplinary learning (engagement with multiple disciplinary contexts), and
- service learning (engagement with social or civic contexts).¹

Active Learning moves beyond mere lecturing, making students an integral part of their own learning instead of passive recipients of transmitted knowledge. Just a few strategies for active learning include:

- Short-term partnerships: turn-and-talk, think-pair-share, write-pair-share, jigsaw, case studies
- Discussion groups or study groups: student meet inside or outside of class to discuss course content, complete assignments, and study for exams, sometimes facilitated by a graduate assistant or peer mentor
- Problem-based or project-based learning: projects last for the majority of the course, grouping students in collaborative teams. The instructor sets the problem but groups must search for relevant information and construct solutions. Instructors guide students but do not exercise control over their work.

Experiential Learning begins in the classroom but extends into real-world settings, allowing students to put their learning into practice, developing their ability to apply knowledge, make decisions, and accept responsibility for their choices. This commonly takes place through:

- Internships: temporary part-time positions with companies or organizations in which students function as employees, sometimes with pay, usually for one or two semesters
- Practicum experiences: workplace experiences conducted under the supervision of a faculty member and a cooperating member of the organization who provides professional guidance. Examples include student teaching or clinical experiences in nursing.
- Co-op: full-time professional work experiences, often with pay, during which students pause their coursework until the co-op is completed
- Externships: short-term practical work experiences lasting from a day to a week, often over the summer, spring break, or winter break. Externships are generally unpaid and may include job shadowing or observation of others’ work.

Multi/Interdisciplinary Learning integrates information, data, methods, perspectives, and ways of knowing from two or more disciplines, usually for the purpose of solving problems, creating projects, or conducting an investigation in ways that would be unlikely through a single discipline.²

Service Learning/Civic Engagement takes learning out of the classroom and into the community. Instructors establish partnerships with nonprofit organizations, service providers, governmental agencies, schools, and so on, creating opportunities for students to apply their learning while serving others. These partnerships might take the form of a course assignment, or they might be a co-curricular option, a graduation requirement, or even span multiple semesters.

The common thread among all of these strategies is that students are active participants in the learning process. Traditional lecture still has its place, but research shows it to be among the most ineffective approaches to instruction.³ The human brain learns better by doing than by listening alone, so the more we can adjust our pedagogical methods to involve students in engaged learning, the more effective our instruction will be.

¹ Bowen, S. (2005). “Engaged Learning: Are We All on the Same Page?” *Peer Review: Association of American Colleges and Universities*. Vol 7. No. 2 <https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/engaged-learning-are-we-all-same-page>

² Boix, Mansilla, V. *Interdisciplinary Learning: A cognitive-Epistemological Foundation*. In: *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity, Second Edition*. Edited by Robert Frodeman, Julie Thompson Klein, and Roberto C.S. Pacheco: Oxford University Press (2017). P. 263-4.

³ Lee, D. (1993). *Listening: Our Most Used Communication Skill*. University of Missouri Extension. <https://mospace.umsystem.edu/xmlui/handle/10355/50293>