Five High-Impact Teaching Practices

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If we want our teaching to have a major impact on student learning, what are some ideas that can help us do that? Since 1990, the scholars of teaching and learning have been generating a wealth of new ideas about college-level teaching. All of these are good ideas, but which ones have the most potential to have a high impact on student engagement and student learning? In this article, I offer my list of five high-impact teaching practices. Implementing any one of these can improve almost anyone's teaching; implementing two or three of them will provide an amazing experience—an experience that will be as exciting for the professor as it will be for the students.

Introduction

In 2008, George Kuh and his colleagues at the National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE] presented a list of ten "High Impact Practices", commonly known as "HIPs" (Kuh, 2008). These were educational practices that seemed to account for the regular high scores that some institutions received when they used the survey of student engagement. Two years later, Brownell and Swaner (2010) summarized the evidence on five of these high-impact practices: First-year seminars, learning communities, service learning, undergraduate research, and capstone courses and projects. The data in Brownell and Swaner's report indicate that students who participate in these practices improve in retention, grades, and graduation rates.

However, in my view as a faculty developer, these HIPs are primarily institutional or curricular practices. That is, most of these are not practices that a professor can incorporate within a specific course that he or she is teaching. This led to the question: Is there a parallel set of high-impact *teaching* practices (HITPs)?

I believe there are. Since the early 1990s, the scholars of teaching and learning have been generating a wealth of new and powerful ideas on college-level teaching (e.g., books on active learning, evaluating student learning, educative assessment, dealing with student diversity, using technology effectively, and flipped classrooms). While I can vouch, from personal experience and the testimony of others, that all of these ideas are "good," my perception is that they are not all "equally good." That is, some seem to have an exceptional ability to create high levels of student engagement and student learning.

What are the practices that have this potential for being "High-Impact Teaching Practices"? Based on my forty years of working in this field, here is my list of HITPs:

1. Helping students become meta-learners
2. Learning-centered course design
3. Using small groups in a powerful way
4. Service-learning/community engagement—with reflection
5. Being a leader with your students

In this essay, I describe each HITP briefly and comment on what it can do to help teachers increase student engagement and improve student learning.

Five HITPs

Helping Students Become Meta-Learners

A widespread and long-standing lament in higher education is that students do not take a high level of

responsibility for their own learning. Many do not come to class regularly, and while in class, they spend time checking email and Facebook; they don't put any serious effort into doing their homework. In short, they are not doing what they need to do to be successful learners in college.

What can we do about this? Over the years, researchers and theorists in higher education have addressed this problem using the concepts of metacognition (Metcalfe & Shimamura, 1994; Harcker, Dunlosky, & Graesser, 1998; Kaplan & Silver, 2013) and self-regulated learning (Pintrich, 1995; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2008; Nilson, 2013). Many of the recent publications have drawn heavily on the concept of mindset developed by Carol Dweck (2006). Doyle and Zakrajsek (2013) put together a book on this same topic aimed at college students rather than the teachers.

All of these publications have useful ideas and overlap in their recommendations. My own preference, though, is for using the umbrella concept of "meta-learning," which refers to "learning about learning." For me, this is a broader and more encompassing concept than, for example, meta-cognition, which is "thinking about thinking." We want thinking, of course, but learning involves factors that include but go beyond thinking.

Dr. Saundra McGuire and her colleagues in the learning center at Louisiana State University (LSU) developed a novel approach based in part on helping students gain confidence in their ability to learn (McGuire 2015). She encountered many first-year and first-generation students who did not know how to be effective learners. In her analysis, they had two problems. First, students thought their intelligence had a fixed quantity, and they were not sure their quantity was sufficient to do college-level work. Second, they did not know how to study or how to learn well.

Two activities were subsequently developed by Dr. McGuire to improve students' ability to learn. The first is an exercise that quickly demonstrates to students that their level of intelligence (or, at least, their ability to perform intellectual tasks) can be rapidly and dramatically improved if they correctly understand (a) what the teacher really wants them to learn to do (e.g., solve problems rather than memorize everything), and (b) that the subject of the course has a structure (i.e., it is more than a collection of unrelated facts, principles, formulas—all of which have to be memorized independently). Second, once they *believe* that they can improve their ability to learn college-level material, Dr. McGuire shows them how to study more effectively, using the tried-and-true method of Preview, Attend, Review, Study, and Assess.

Dr. McGuire implements these activities a few weeks into the term, after students have completed one or two exams and several have discovered that the way they studied in high school worked just fine there, but is not working in college. She then offers students the chance to attend a one-hour, voluntary session at a time when most students will be available. By now, a good percentage of students can see the potential benefit of the session and choose to attend. In this session, she leads them through the two activities described above.

Other teachers have also incorporated learning strategies sessions into their courses. One chemistry professor at LSU used this intervention in her first-year general chemistry course (McGuire, 2015, pp. 135-137). This course had several hundred students in it. In her fall 2011 offering of the course, Dr. Cook arranged for Dr. McGuire to present her 50-minute session on "learning how to learn" at a regular class meeting, without telling the students in advance, and they compared student performance of two groups: those who attended the intervention session (N=450+) and those who were absent that day (N=175+). The attendees had a mean score of 74% on the first exam; the mean for the non-attendees was 68.2%. However, the mean of the final course grades for the attendees was 81.6 while the mean for the non-attendees was 70.4.

At another university, Prof. Zhao (2014) tried this process with his General Chemistry course at a large, public, research-intensive university in Tennessee. Figure 1 compares three exam scores during each of the 2009, 2010, and 2011 offerings of the course. The enrollment in these courses generally ranged from 70 to 100 students. In 2011, he used the interventions described by McGuire after the first exam; the average class scores on the second and third

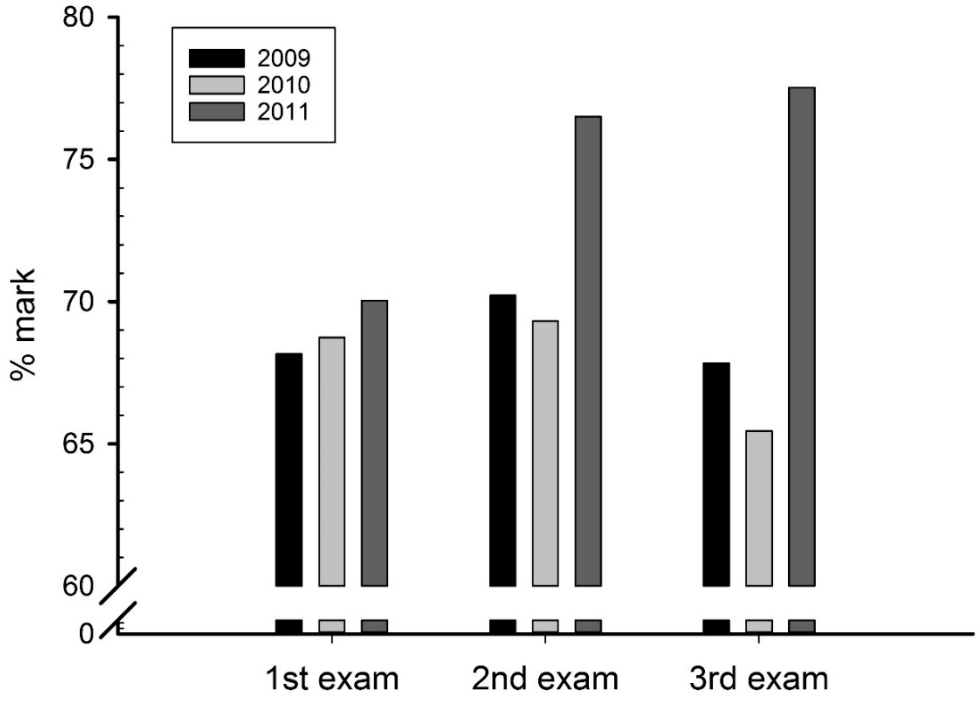

Figure 1

Student Performance on 3 Exams, in 3 Years. A learning strategies session was implemented between the 1st and 2nd exams in Fall 2011 (Zhao, Wardeska, McGuire & Cook 2014).

exams in 2011 were considerably higher than the scores in 2009 and 2010.

The data in figure 1 shows that this kind of intervention can have a positive effect for many students. However, for a subset of these students, the impact can be more than "positive" – it can be enormous and life-changing. McGuire (2015) has shared some data and stories about students to whom she has introduced these ideas in one-on-one discussions. One student, who came to LSU on a prestigious physics scholarship to become a medical physicist, was about to drop out of her first physics course and change majors because of a very low score, 54%, on the second exam (McGuire, 2015, pp. 18-19). She happened to meet Dr. McGuire, who convinced her to explore these ideas about learning. Subsequently, this student earned an A in that physics course, graduated from LSU with a 3.8 GPA, and, in 2014, received her master's degree in medical physics from the world-renowned University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center.

Another student, who wanted to be a pre-college math teacher, had flunked out of LSU twice (McGuire, 2015, pp. 160-161). Later, some community people noticed his uncommon ability not only to help students get better grades when he tutored them, but to help them enjoy math. They contacted McGuire, who arranged for conditional readmission. She shared these same ideas about learning with this student as he entered a conditional set of 3 summer session courses. He earned a 4.0 in those three courses, and went on to graduate from LSU in 2009 with a 3.9 GPA for all courses he completed after being readmitted. Today, he is a happy and successful math teacher for middle school and high school students.

By spending a relatively small amount of time early in the course helping students learn about learning (i.e. become meta-learners), teachers can not only help these students improve their exam scores in a particular course, but they can also give students a proper understanding of learning and the confidence

they need to succeed in all of their college courses. In some cases, this can change their college experience from one of failure to one of success, and thereby move their whole life in a dramatically more positive direction.

Learning-Centered Course Design

The vast majority of college teachers have had no formal training for the task of designing their courses. Therefore, they follow the common approach of their predecessors: identify the major topics for a given course, determine how much time to spend on each topic, and then prepare a series of lectures and exams on each topic. Unless the teacher has an extraordinary ability to work up highly dramatic presentations, this topic-oriented approach to course design often results in low student engagement and poor performance on course exams.

In a learning-centered approach, teachers begin by (a) deciding what they really want students to learn by the end of the course (i.e. they identify their desired learning outcomes). They then (b) identify which assessment activities would indicate how well the students had achieved each kind of learning, and (c) which learning activities would in fact enable students to fully achieve each kind of learning.

Diamond (1989, 2008) was one of the first to lay out a systematic approach to designing instruction in higher education, both at the curricular and course level. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) described a process of designing instruction that has been influential in higher education, even though it was written for pre-collegiate teachers.

In my book on this topic (Fink, 2013), I offered both a new Taxonomy of Significant Learning and a model of Integrated Course Design (ICD). The Taxonomy helps teachers identify multiple kinds of valuable learning, and the ICD model guides the creation of learning experiences that enables students to achieve the desired learning outcomes.

The Taxonomy of Significant Learning is similar to the famous taxonomy of cognitive learning developed by Bloom and his colleagues (1956) in that it prompts teachers to consider a broader range of desired kinds of learning than most would do intuitively. However, my taxonomy differs from Bloom's taxonomy in two important ways. First, it has a different origin. Bloom asked college professors what they really wanted their students to learn. He then analyzed their responses and identified six fundamental kinds of learning. My taxonomy originated in conversations with college students, not professors. Over the years, I asked students two related questions. First: "Have you ever had a course in which you learned something that had the power to change the way you lived your life since then?" (Note: This is my definition of "significant learning"). Students usually said most courses did not do that, but a few did. Then I asked the second question: "In those courses that did do this, specifically what was it you learned that had this capability to change the way you have lived your life since then?" Like Bloom, I took students' many different answers and identified six distinct kinds of learning, as shown in Figure 2.

A second important difference between Bloom's taxonomy and mine is that the former is hierarchical whereas the latter is synergistic. This means each kind of learning makes it easier for students to achieve the others.

Teachers can use this taxonomy the same way they used Bloom's for several decades: to help them write desired learning outcomes for their courses. If they use this taxonomy to do that, their learning outcomes might look like the following:

> My goal is that, by the end of this course, students will be able to….
>
> 1. *Understand and remember* the key concepts, terms, relationships, etc.
> 2. Know how to *use* the content.
> 3. Be able to *relate* this subject to other subjects.
> 4. Understand the *personal and social* implications of knowing about this subject.
> 5. *Value* this subject and further learning about it.
> 6. Know how to *keep on learning* about this subject, after the course is over.

Figure 2

The Taxonomy of Significant Learning

How does one get all of this to happen in a single course? The short answer is to make sure you carefully design the course. The fuller answer is to follow each of the major steps in the model of Integrated Course Design, as illustrated in Figure 3.

This process begins by imagining a powerful and exciting set of learning goals, using the Taxonomy of Significant Learning as a guide. Second, all learning goals are placed into the left-hand column of the 3-column table. Third, for each goal identify separate and appropriate assessment ("What would students have to do for you to know they had achieved this learning goal?") and learning activities ("What would students have to do to achieve the desired learning?"). Finally, all of the activities in the two right-hand columns are placed into the Weekly Schedule for the course. Two important principles must be kept in mind as this is completed. First, it is necessary to put all the activities from the 3-column table into the course somewhere; if they are absent, then the activities needed to achieve the learning goals will also be absent. Second, the sequence of the activities must be considered. They must build on each other and culminate in a challenging project for students to work on. If this design process is properly followed, the result by the end of the course should be that the majority of students achieve the learning goals imagined at the beginning.

How well does this learning-centered approach to designing courses work? To answer this question, I asked a group of 19 professors, who had used ICD extensively, to write their answers to three questions about their experience (Fink & Fink, 2009):

1. What impact did it have on student engagement?
2. What impact did it have on student learning?
3. What impact did it have on you as a teacher?

What were the professors' answers to these questions? First, they liked the wide range of the kinds of learning in the Taxonomy of Significant Learning.

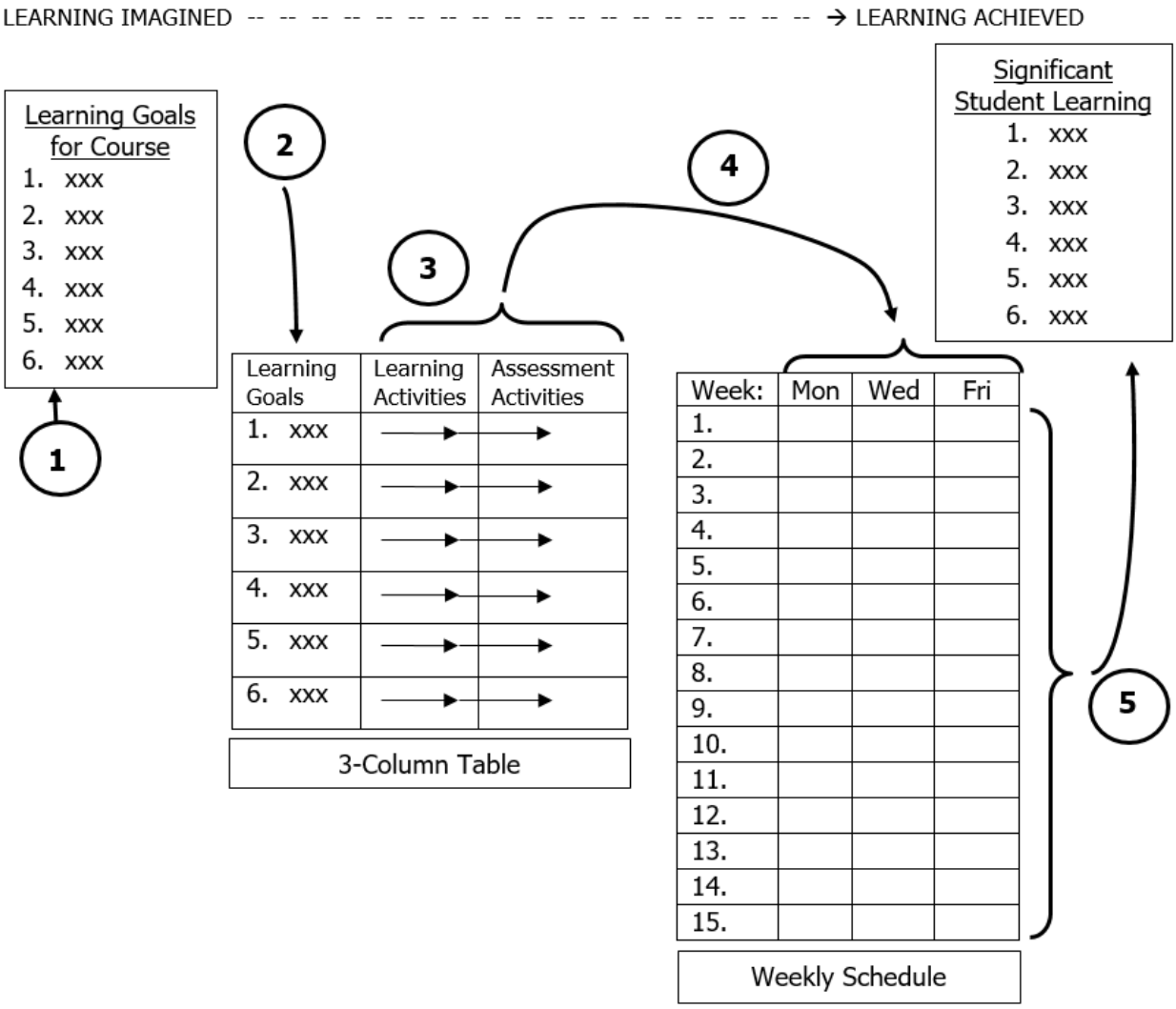

Figure 3

General Sequence of the Integrated Course Design Process. The circled numbers indicate the proper sequence of activities in this process: Identify the major learning goals (1, 2), use the 3-column table to identify appropriate learning and assessment activities for each goal (3), and then put the activities in a dynamic sequence in the weekly schedule (4).

Many said they had often secretly wanted to work on several of these—for example, on helping students get excited about this subject or helping them learn how to work effectively in a group—but had never felt these were legitimate learning goals. They felt the Taxonomy of Significant Learning in essence gave them permission to include such learning in their courses. Second, they also felt the ideas of active learning, educative assessment, and small group activities introduced with the model of ICD helped them generate much higher levels of student engagement. This engagement, properly directed, led to much higher levels of student learning than they had previously obtained with students. Finally, as one might expect, the professors almost unanimously reported that designing their courses this way had a major impact on themselves as teachers. Many had become disillusioned by the low levels of student engagement in their courses, but seeing their students become excited had made teaching exciting again.

A few examples follow of other professors who have published books focusing on specific parts of the

course design process. Wiggins (1998) has described assessment procedures that not only record student achievement, but also improve it, hence warranting the label of "educative assessment." Walvoord and Anderson (2010) provided invaluable guidance on how to conduct assessment activities that are related to one's learning goals. Barkley (2010) laid out a set of learning activities that are capable of greatly enhancing student engagement. Barkley and Major (2016) have described 50 learning assessment techniques that are organized around the six categories in the Taxonomy of Significant Learning.

Using Small Groups in a Powerful Way

Since the early 1980s, several scholars of teaching and learning have described the benefits of getting students to work together in small in-class groups (Bouton & Garth, 1983; Millis & Cottell, 1997; Bruffee, 1999). Later, Barkley and Major (2014) described multiple specific techniques for collaborative learning.

Getting students to discuss focused questions about the subject matter—in class, in small groups – has the potential benefit of stimulating student engagement and a deeper understanding of how to use the content to solve complex, challenging problems. However, if not used properly, these activities can be time-consuming, and can even generate a strong negative reaction from some students.

Larry Michaelsen, originally a business professor at the University of Oklahoma, developed a unique way of using small groups that increased the potential benefits and avoided the common problems. His "Team-Based Learning" (TBL) differentiates "teams" from "groups." All groups are "groups" when they begin, but under the right conditions, they can evolve into "teams." When groups become highly cohesive and the members become more concerned about the welfare of the group than about themselves individually, they have become teams. Good teams are capable of learning more quickly and more deeply than good groups, and definitely more than good individuals.

In his first book on the topic (Michaelsen, Bauman, & Fink, 2004), Michaelsen identified the specific procedures that groups need to evolve quickly into cohesive, high-performing teams. These procedures involve group formation, appropriate assignments for groups, creating individual and group accountability, and prompt feedback. Since then, he and others have written additional books on how to use TBL in specific fields of knowledge (Michaelsen, Parmelee, McMahon, & Levine, 2008; Michaelsen, Sweet, & Parmalee, 2008; Sweet & Michaelsen, 2008) and on what teachers who are first-time users need to know (Sibley & Ostafichuk, 2014).

The basic sequence of activities in TBL, in an example of a few weeks focused on one major topic in the course, is illustrated in Figure 4.

Preparation Phase

Students begin by doing all the reading for this unit at the front end of the two weeks. Then, without any lectures on the unit, students take a test on the readings—in a special way. First, they take the test individually. Then, they take the same test as a group. During the group test, students learn to work together to determine the best answer to challenging questions. Both scores, individual and group, contribute toward their final course grade; this system provides individual and group accountability, which is important. By the end of this phase, they have a moderately good understanding of the content.

Application Phase

Next, the groups spend several class sessions working on complex, challenging, authentic problems—in groups, in class, with immediate feedback. This immediate feedback occurs in two ways. First, the groups learn which of the other groups agreed with their answer. This happens because all groups report their answers at the same time (e.g., by holding up color-coded and numbered answer cards). When different groups have different answers, the teacher leads a discussion between them. A second form of feedback occurs when, after this comparison of answers, some groups still do not understand why a particular answer is best for a given question. They

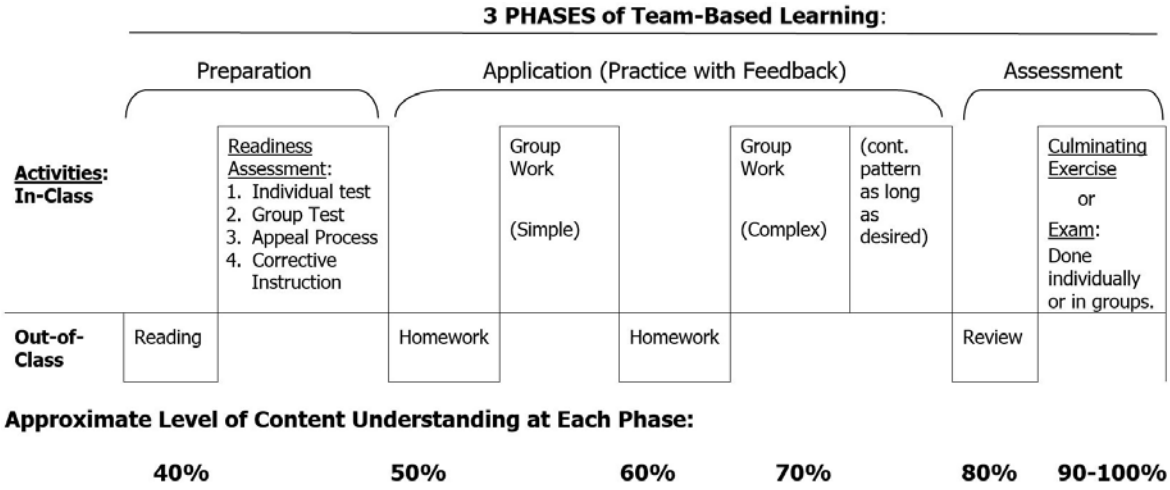

Figure 4

The Basic Sequence of Learning Activities in Team-Based Learning
For a 2-3 week block of time, covering one major topic within the course.

can ask the teacher for clarification, and the teacher is able to provide corrective instruction (i.e., feedback) in a just-in-time process focused on a particular issue. Eventually, either by themselves or with the help of the teacher, the teams figure out the best answers to various application problems.

In this process of working on problems, students learn how to articulate their reasoning to others, initially within their groups and then between groups. They also learn how to work effectively within a group; for example, they learn how to listen closely to ideas different than their own without getting defensive, how to articulate a counter-view that can be "heard" by someone with a different view, when to compromise, and when to speak up.

Assessment Phase

Finally, when the students are ready, the teacher gives a graded assessment activity: either an individual exam (with a combination of knowledge and application questions) or a group application exercise with an authentic, life-like problem to solve.

People who have learned how to use TBL effectively and who have written about their experiences describe multiple benefits (Michaelsen et al., 2004; Michaelsen et al., 2008; Sweet & Michaelsen, 2012). The most dramatic change is the energy level in the course. This is not an over-statement: almost every student in the course is highly engaged and energized in nearly all class sessions. During the course, and especially at the end, students are keenly aware of how much they are learning. As a result, even students who think they learn best when learning by themselves discover they learn even more when they learn to work effectively with others. And finally, as a student commented after a course of mine in which I used TBL: "All important work today is done in groups. Anyone who doesn't learn how to work effectively with others in a group, is seriously underprepared for today's workplace."

Does this teaching strategy require more time, meaning fewer topics get covered in content-heavy courses? A surprising thing happens when this strategy is implemented effectively: students learn new material at a faster rate after they become coherent as a team. Initially, the groups take more time to learn because students are learning how to work together effectively, but once they become a coherent team, the *rate* of learning substantially increases. A professor at my university in a content-dense discipline, Civil Engineering, shared his experience on this topic (D. Sabatini, personal communication, 2000). Prior to using TBL, he needed 15 weeks to "cover" a particular set of topics. After he learned how to use TBL effectively, he found that, in the second half of the semester, topics that

had required students two weeks to master had been covered in one or one-and-a-half weeks. Net result? The class successfully learned all the previous set of topics in 13 weeks; he had to find new topics for them to study during the remaining two weeks.

Service Learning (Community Engagement) – with Reflection

Service learning has been used for many years in higher education, but only by a minority of college teachers (Zlotkowski, 1998; Campus Compact, 1998; Bowden, M.A. & Billig, S.H., 2008; Cress, Collier, & Reitenauer, 2013; Jacoby, 2014). Some do not like the connotation of "charity work" associated with that label, and therefore prefer the term "community engagement."

The central idea in either case is that the teacher finds a community group or organization with which students can provide some kind of meaningful work for a period of time. In the process, students deepen and extend their education in a variety of valuable ways. When teachers place students into meaningful and challenging situations, and provide a well-focused structure for reflecting on the experience, participation in a service-learning project puts students into life and working situations that are new and different, thereby rendering them capable of experiencing new and valuable kinds of learning.

Service learning/community engagement as pedagogy invites students to put theory into practice in real-world situations. Projects are designed in collaboration with community partners and in response to genuine community needs. They can range from low-threshold participant-observation projects to in-depth community-engaged research projects that span a semester or even multiple courses. Examples of low-threshold projects include a psychology course in which students volunteer in a local Head Start program or at a senior citizen home to deepen their understanding of human development, and a field biology course in which students serve as "citizen scientists" by contributing data on invasive insects to an online database designed to report and share critical environmental information with scientists and managers. Higher-threshold projects might put already-developed research skills into practice, and service learning can even sustain projects across different courses. For example, sociology students in one course may work with local partners to develop and implement an assessment of an after-school arts program, and then hand the data off to students in another course for analysis and presentation to the program's leadership. A single community-engaged project can even span different disciplines; for example, a multi-year focus on inner-city access to healthy food includes work done by students in the biological sciences, social sciences, and humanities.

Teachers who want to use this practice benefit greatly if there is a careful set of procedures in place to guide them through the process. The coordinator of Community Engagement at Bates College, for example, described their procedures (Darby Ray, personal communication, 2015). Their Community-Engaged Learning (CEL) courses include: (a) consultation or collaboration with a community partner to ensure the CEL project addresses a problem, challenge, or need that is identified as important by the partner, and that project methods will do no harm to the community, (b) critical examination of the context of the community problem or challenge the project will engage, and (c) opportunities for students to reflect on the academic and civic value of their community engagement. Most colleges and universities have faculty or professional staff tasked with supporting faculty who want to learn more about community-engaged teaching, or who need help developing projects or connecting to potential community partners. Increasingly, faculty incentive and reward programs are recognizing this work as innovative pedagogy.

In 2015, the director of community engagement at Bates College wanted to assess the impact of CEL courses (Darby Ray, personal communication, 2016). She asked the 48 professors who had taught a CEL course in the 2014-2015 academic year to complete a 5-question survey about their experiences. The survey asked whether they thought the CEL experiences had increased student engagement in the course, enhanced student understanding of the course topics, increased student

understanding of the off-campus community, helped accomplish the learning goals of the course, or had given students a meaningful opportunity to develop valuable knowledge, relationships, and/or skills.

Of the 31 professors who responded, over 90% (29 of 31) agreed or strongly agreed with each of the five statements: 70-80% of the respondents strongly agreed with each item, depending on the question. The vast majority of the professors at this college thought that community engagement activities had multiple strong benefits for their courses and their students.

Need for Reflection

However, the learning that results from these special experiences easily can be latent and stay only in the subconscious. What students also need is to engage in individual reflection, perhaps supplemented by group discussions. This need for reflection brings to mind the frequently cited paraphrase of a statement attributed to John Dewey: "We do not learn from experience…. We learn from reflecting on experience" (Dewey, 1933, pp. 78-79).

Using structured questions as prompts, students spend time thinking explicitly and consciously about what they experienced and what they can learn from those experiences. They articulate the results of this reflection, either in oral discussions and/or in a written document, such as a learning portfolio. If questions are used to structure this reflection, they might be focused on the themes shown in Figure 5.

Placing students in service learning situations gives them the possibility of new kinds of learning. Adding reflection to this process can help them become more aware of what they have learned.

I. **WHAT did you learn from this special experience, about…**
- The subject of this course or the discipline?
- Other people: their background, situation, feelings, behavior?
- Yourself: your beliefs, values, skills, behavior, life goals, career aspirations—and any changes you want to make in these?

II. HOW did you learn all this?
- What were the kinds of experiences that were especially powerful in terms of prompting the above kinds of learning, e.g., observations of events, conversations with individuals or groups, doing things yourself, etc.?

III. WHAT VALUE might all this have for you in the future?
- How might the kinds of learning described above have an impact on your life in the future, for example, in:
  - Your personal life?
  - Your social interactions with other individuals or groups?
  - The level and kind of civic involvement and engagement you choose to have?
  - Your professional life?

IV. WHAT ELSE has this experience made you want to learn?
- Given these recent experiences, what else do you want to learn about or do, later in life?
- How would you learn about or learn how to do that?

Figure 5

Questions to Structure REFLECTION on Community Engagement Experience

Being a Leader with One's Students

College professors don't often associate the concept of leadership with what they do as teachers. Numerous books exist on educational leadership, but generally focus on teachers' leadership with their colleagues and within the institution as an organization. In my view, recognizing our roles as leaders with our students has the potential to both help us understand our problems and to enhance student learning.

To explain why I think leadership has this potential, let me place it in the context of my model of "The Fundamental Tasks of Teaching", as illustrated in Figure 6. This diagram suggests that

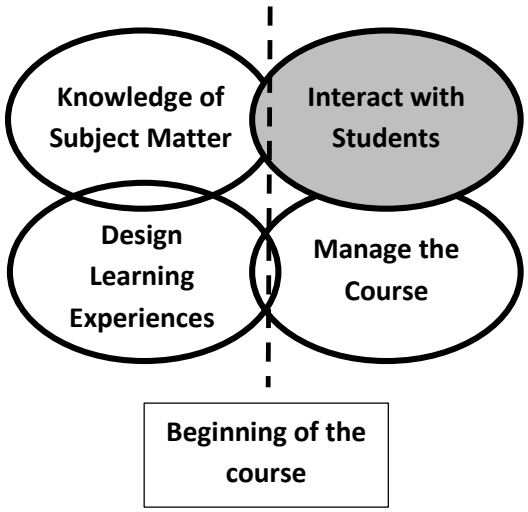

Figure 6
Interacting with Students: One of the Fundamental Tasks of Teaching (Adapted from Fink, 2013, p. 26, Fig. 1.1)

everything someone does as a teacher is a specific aspect of one or another of these four fundamental tasks of teaching. First, all teachers—good or bad, traditional or innovative—need to have some knowledge of the subject matter they are teaching. Second, they have to make decisions about how they want the course to happen: how will students get their initial exposure to the content [lectures, readings, internet]? How will the teacher assess student learning? Will they use small groups, and, if so, will the group work be graded? Will they use reflective writing? The process of making these decisions is what I refer to as designing the learning experience. Third, they interact with students. This happens when the teacher is lecturing, leading a discussion, meeting with students one-on-one during office hours, or emailing students. Fourth, the teacher has to manage the course. This refers to the management of data (who has dropped the course, who is still enrolled, who took the test, who took it a second time, which grade counts) and of products of student work (e.g., student papers).

Our potential role as a leader with our students is embedded in the way we "Interact with Students" (as shown in Figure 7). My own definition of leadership is: being able to motivate and enable others to do important things well. In an educational setting, the "others" are the students and the "something important" is high quality learning.

So the leadership question becomes: what can a teacher do to motivate and enable students to accomplish high quality learning? There are multiple specific answers to this question, but the general answer is that the teacher has to establish the right kind of relationship with students, individually and collectively. The right kind of relationship, in a teaching-learning situation, is one in which both the teacher and the students are caring, respectful, and collaborative (Fullan, 2001).

What can teachers do to create good relationships with their students? Bain (2004) studied many teachers on multiple campuses, teachers who, according to everyone on campus, are "really great teachers!" When I analyzed the stories in Bain's book, there were four lessons I gleaned about how teachers can create leadership relationships with their students.

First, interact in a way that shows you care about the students, student learning, and the teaching-learning process, as well as about the subject of the course.

Second, interact in a way that motivates students. Give praise in a way that motivates. Listen well to the learner. Adjust your interactions with each student to their individual personality

Third, use dynamic communication skills. Use a language of "promise" rather than of "demands." Believe in all students' ability to learn. Celebrate achievements. Use warm language.

Fourth, be trustworthy regarding power issues. Don't use the classroom to demonstrate power. Build trust relationships. Give students the power to make decisions regarding their own learning (as much as possible). Have the same policies for all students.

There will always be special situations that challenge this principle of "same policy for all students," but, in general, applying a policy for one student and not for another creates a danger for the teacher—a risk of appearing to have "favorites" and treating those students preferentially. This is never good, whether the course has 25 students or 250 students. Nilson (2010) and Ambrose et al (2010) shed additional light on the issue of teacher-student relationships.

Most teachers incorporate some, but not all, of these principles of good leadership in the interactions with their students. The more we can apply all of them, the more we will be effective leaders who motivate and enable students to do important things well.

Conclusion: The Synergistic Impact of HITPs

Learning how to use any one of these High Impact Teaching Practices will definitely have a positive impact. However, if we can implement several or all of them, the results will be truly amazing in terms of increasing student engagement and the quality of student learning. Figure 7 illustrates the interactive or synergistic nature of these teaching practices.

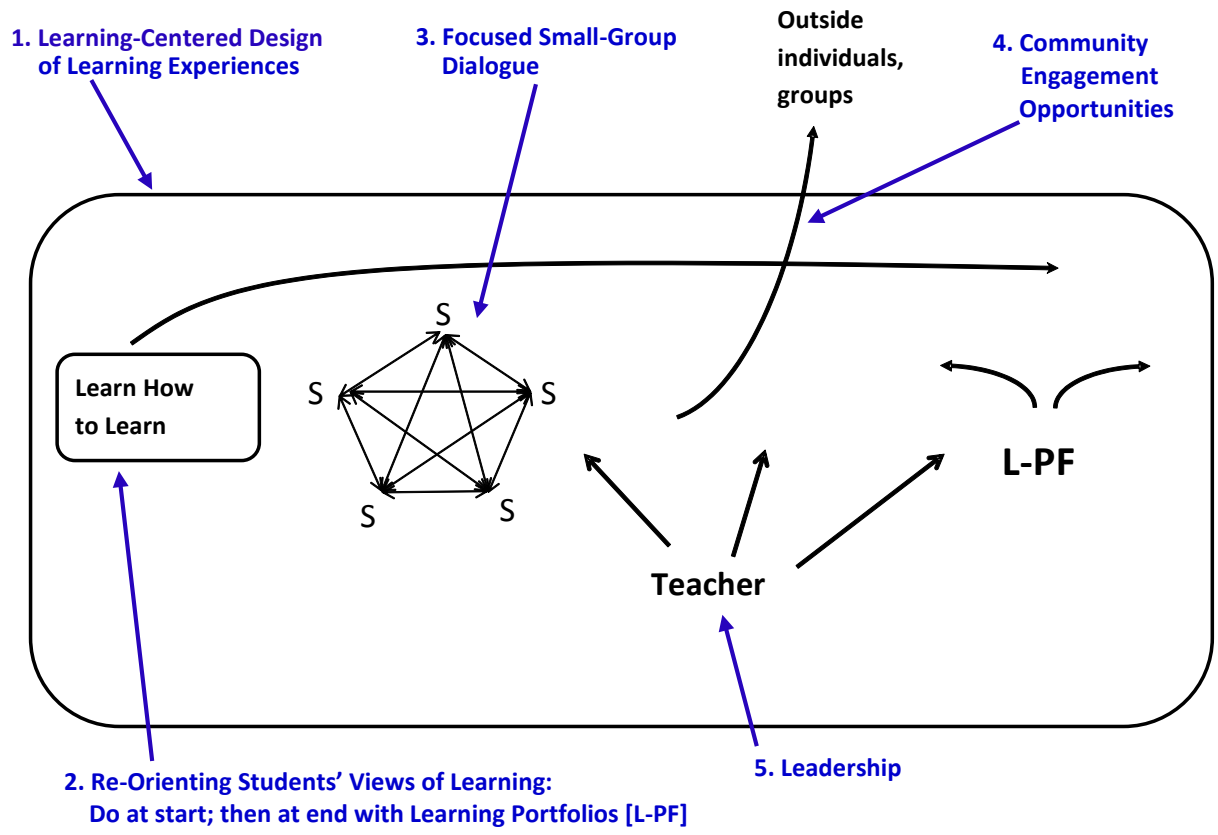

Figure 7

The Synergistic Nature of the 5 High Impact Teaching Practices

When the whole set of learning experiences is designed in a learning-centered way, a framework is created that is integrated with the learning and assessment activities and teaching strategy—all focused on supporting important kinds of learning. Second, if some activities that help students take a more positive and insightful view of learning and of themselves as learners are built into the front end of the course, students will be able to engage more fully with the course learning activities. Third, procedures that set up powerful, small group dialogue will generate a tremendous amount of energy that will add power to all the other activities. Fourth, if students become engaged with individuals or groups in a larger community in which students see the value of what they are learning in a larger context, they will gain insight into themselves and the world at large. And finally, if students are asked to do some retrospective and forward-looking reflection near the end of this whole process, they themselves will make the connections between their learning, their own lives, and the multiple purposes that learning can serve.

Gearing up to do all this will take time—time to learn about these practices and time to learn how to properly implement them. In my own journey as a teacher, this shift happened gradually over a period of some years. However, I saw the powerful effect of using these ideas on my students, and also on their engagement and their learning. We need our institutions to provide time for us to engage in professional development. If institutional leaders can provide this time, and if we can use that time to learn about and begin implementing ideas like those described here, anyone who commits to making this journey will in fact move in the direction of becoming what we all want to be: extraordinarily High Impact Teachers.

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Biography

L. Dee Fink, PhD retired from the University of Oklahoma in 2005. He was the founding director of the Instructional Development Program at the university, 1979–2005. Currently, he is doing international consulting on teaching and learning in higher education.