

Book Review

Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty

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Citation: Barkley, E. F. (2009). *Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
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Publisher Description: Keeping students involved, motivated, and actively learning is challenging educators across the country, yet good advice on how to accomplish this has not been readily available. *Student Engagement Techniques* is a comprehensive resource that offers college teachers a dynamic model for engaging students and includes over one hundred tips, strategies, and techniques that have been proven to help teachers from a wide variety of disciplines and institutions motivate and connect with their students. The ready-to-use format shows how to apply each of the book's techniques in the classroom and includes purpose, preparation, procedures, examples, online implementation, variations and extensions, observations and advice, and key resources.

Overall, Barkley supplies faculty with a solid, provocative text providing clear examples, guides, and best practices, which could aid faculty in any discipline. The author provides a list of indicators of engagement in addition to a well thought out definition of engagement to illustrate the author's lens. Barkley makes reference to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) as well as making a case for motivation versus active learning; this was particularly salient and reinforced student engagement as a product, not the sum. From my perspective, I would like to have also seen a depiction from the author on what being a learning-centered faculty member looks like.

The introductory chapters (one to two) seem to be missing some visual comparisons that I feel would have strengthened the overall impact of the material; particularly a visual depicting transformative learning. The author could have included a paragraph on academic self-esteem referencing Maslow or referring back to Maslow's research in the Covington section of the second chapter. I found the text lacked any means to address learning disabilities or low academic self-esteem. The introductory chapters were very well written and, while the teasing out of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation was predictable, it was necessary and well articulated.

Chapter three was lacking in the author's omission of information related to learning disabilities and brain function. This would have benefitted faculty who teach students with

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learning disabilities and maintained inclusivity in the chapter. I found critical thinking missing from this section. The critical-thinking addition could have enriched the chapter by providing more context and complexity related to how the brain operates when learning occurs.

Chapter four has some somewhat outdated terminology. The learning that takes place outside of the classroom complements the academic or curricular experience, it is not in addition to as the term extracurricular implies. Co-curricular student engagement and learning are a welcome addition to this chapter and I am very pleased to see the author include it. I did not find significant value in the affect/memory section of the chapter starting on page 34. I felt the substance of the chapter had enough breadth and depth without this content.

Chapter five complements content from the second chapter and the text would flow more effortlessly were chapter five directly after chapter two. I felt a section on the student's role in investing energy in the co-creation of the learning environment is necessary and would benefit this chapter. Incorporation of Astin's Input-Environment-Output (I-E-O) model (1993) citing students' putting forth intellectual energy toward shaping their learning experience is one avenue to consider. Additionally, this section would complement the motivational arena.

Chapter six was by far my favorite chapter of the book. The much needed inclusivity was delivered and it did not disappoint. The author finally spoke to critical thinking, diversity, best practices, and course delivery; the narratives were exceptional. Logistically, there were duplicate subheadings (e.g. Community) that could be combined. After reading page 71, I find the content or theme of the text to translate more to *Giving Students Voice*.

Chapter seven struggles with word choice on page 83; the term criticism has a negative connotation I find distracting and not learner-centered. I believe the same effect could be achieved through the lens of constructive feedback. Chapter seven's backward design approach is stellar. The author brilliantly executed this section and it was very clear and easy to follow. I found the Weimer/Blumberg content should have been introduced sooner, particularly in chapter two. In addition, I believe Fink would have been more useful in the introduction to the chapter as opposed to the current placement. Table 7.1 is very user-friendly. Lastly, the flow of the chapter would have been more fluid if there were a reversal of Tip/Strategy (T/S) 12, "Help students expect to succeed" and T/S 11, Expect students to succeed.

The outcomes section in chapter eight lacks a clear delineation between an assessment plan and evaluation of student learning or gauging the effectiveness of outcomes/goals. This section has real potential and may warrant some slight modifications. However, I find the rubric on page 81 to be quite helpful and I am impressed the author provided a link for rubrics included as a resource. Chapter nine would benefit from more emphasis on physical classroom desk/table setup. I suggest including diagrams and creative ways to utilize space and the impact on the dynamics. As mentioned earlier, I would recommend more discussion of diversity including incorporating multiculturalism and diversity as a whole (e.g. modifying lessons when a student is blind, deaf, in a wheelchair, etc.) and addressing/supporting students with learning disabilities

Chapter eleven is extremely practical, well written, and visually appealing. The graphic syllabus is fascinating. I would like to suggest incorporating a section on millennials' learning styles and needs.

In chapters twelve to nineteen (SETS), the author offers excellent examples inclusive of online modifications. These chapters can be a bit overwhelming in the first read, but an invaluable resource for later referral. I find the SETS to be highly functional and well organized.

While this book could benefit from future revisions and more inclusive language it provides faculty with a wonderfully useful tool to approach a myriad of learning and classroom issues.

References

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