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## Connecting Learning Across the Institution

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## EDITOR'S NOTES

Public demands for accountability in institutions of higher education concentrate on various definitions of student success (Bain, 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), yet at the heart of these mandates is a focus on improved student learning. What is often missing in these debates, however, is attention to the fuller range of learning that occurs within colleges, including faculty as learners and the role of organizational learning in improving operations and processes on college campuses.

Traditionally, research on higher education occurs in silos based on stakeholder perspective. Thus, one might read an article dedicated to students as learners, another that discusses faculty as adult learners, and yet another that deals with institutional learning or community engagement. This volume seeks to break down these silos and draw together scholars who research learning from the vantage points of a variety of stakeholders in higher education institutions. The objective is to understand what is common in learning across the institution, what differs, and how concepts of learning theory from specific focal areas can expand how we think about learning in general. For example, what can faculty developers learn from the research on integration of learning among students? How does learning by faculty translate into enhanced student learning or organizational learning? How might the emerging discussion linking civic engagement by students to postsecondary access and subsequent learning outcomes of undergraduate students impact the scholarship of teaching and learning? How does research on the role of civic engagement on student learning outcomes inform thinking about organizational learning? A set of four questions framed the research presented in this volume, namely:

- What are the key issues of learning facing each stakeholder group?
- How does the integration of learning occur within and among groups of students, faculty, leaders, and the institution?
- What approaches to learning are transferable among stakeholder groups?
- How do we create an overarching theory of learning that might have multiple applications?

Learning is a cornerstone of the mission of colleges and universities. According to Kolb (1998), “most of us develop learning styles that emphasize some learning abilities over others” (p. 131). Kolb’s Learning Style Inventory (LSI) identifies four types of learning styles that the model divides into quadrants to represent each style. *Accommodators*, *divergers*, *assimilators*, and *convergers* each have distinct learning preferences

and incorporate new information in different ways. What all four of Kolb's learning styles have in common is a willingness to reflect on an experience or an idea and to apply that learning through active experimentation or well-thought-out modifications to existing processes. It is through reflection that an individual can build on his or her existing cognitive schema. Kolb's (1998) research informs how individuals learn, thus it applies to both faculty and students alike.

Mezirow (1997) focuses on learning for adults and described transformational learning in adult learners as a process of critical reflection through which one changes his or her frame of reference. Changes occur as a result of immersion in a new situation, through interactions, and from reading and gaining new information. These shifts in thinking result from the "aha" moments of life. Mezirow's (1997) typology of the four processes of learning is useful in understanding how new knowledge and experiences are incorporated. The first process of learning allows for expansion of current perspectives. The second learning process in Mezirow's typology relates to the creation of new points of view. His third learning process involves a transformation in point of view. The fourth learning process in Mezirow's typology involves an epochal change to an underlying schema. This type of learning is uncommon; more typically, an individual's underlying schema or sense of self is less malleable.

Recent work in the learning sciences focuses on deep learning (Huber & Hutchings, 2004) and adaptive expertise (Budwig, 2013). Situated learning provides opportunities for deep learning to occur through engagement and "involves the learners' gradual adoption of the practices, beliefs, and values of a specific expert community" (Budwig, 2013, p. 43). The LEAP initiative of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (see [http://www.aacu.org/leap/documents/EssentialOutcomes\\_Chart.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/leap/documents/EssentialOutcomes_Chart.pdf)) outlines student learning outcomes that build on development along the domains of knowledge, practice, responsibility, and integration.

Against this backdrop of the ways in which individuals learn is the concept of organizational learning. Similar to individual learning, organizational learning occurs by processing information and ultimately changing behavior (Huber, 1991). Kezar (2005) summarized, "Some of the main concepts in organizational learning are single- and double-looped learning, inquiry and action, theories-in-use, overload, and information interpretation processes such as unlearning and organizational memory (among many others)" (p. 10). As with individuals, it is important for organizations to use feedback loops to reflect on actions and consequences in order to change behavior. Knowing more about how best to intersect the concepts of individual learning and organizational learning can help inform practice within the academy.

The chapters in this volume are tied together by key themes framing research on learning theory. Investigation of the motivating factors for learning for individuals and for institutions pays particular attention to

individual location along the developmental continuum of integration (Barber, 2012). A framework emerges with the compilation of the stakeholder perspectives that allows for a questioning of underlying assumptions regarding learning. By interrogation of the issues facing each stakeholder group, it is possible to highlight the barriers to connecting learning theories across silos that emerge between theoretical approaches to learning based on stakeholder location. Highlighting the differences in discussing learning based on group (i.e., students, faculty, organizations) helps to instead show areas of commonality among the learning theories typically employed to study students, faculty, and organizations. Despite the lack of common naming of terms or theories for stakeholder groups, commonality exists that allows for further advancement of thinking across and within each of these domains.

This volume of *New Directions for Higher Education* explores what it means to bridge learning across the institution. Part I of the volume provides context for the issues facing institutions regarding learning. This Editor's Notes establishes the framework regarding learning theories throughout the institution and identifies key themes in the research. Chapter 1 by Barber provides a framework for how students connect their learning using an integration of learning model. Chapter 2 presents examples of faculty as learners, focusing on how international teaching and research influenced faculty perspectives. In Chapter 3, Moore and Mendez argue that institutionalizing civic engagement enhances student success and intentionally using organizational learning processes can provide support for student learning.

Part II of the volume contains a number of case examples focusing on different stakeholder groups. Chapter 4 by Leslie uses the concept of orthogonality to showcase how stakeholders can view intersections of learning in college and how assessment of outcomes creates a framework to support learning across the college experience. In Chapter 5, Wawrzynski and Baldwin present how connected learning by students using high-impact learning opportunities contributes to student learning outcomes. They articulate how campus mapping of various learning opportunities can create intentionality regarding student learning and provide examples of how to implement this on campus. How faculty support their own learning is the focus of Chapter 6 by Zakrajsek, who argues that peer learning among faculty provides a critical on-campus resource for faculty development. Chapter 7 by VanDerLinden focuses on how blended learning can provide the foundation for strategic changes on campus, and ultimately result in organizational learning.

The last section, Part III, considers plans for the future and implications for practice. In Chapter 8, Amey provides an analysis of the overarching connections among learning theories for the various stakeholder groups. She draws links between various learning theory definitions and offers advice on how to break down existing silos to create a shared understanding of learning theories. In Chapter 9, Neumann and Bolitzer investigate

how individual differences in learning and context create opportunities for creative approaches to learning. Implications for faculty are reviewed and a plan is laid out for leaders to provide the best support for a span of learners. Finally, in Chapter 10, Chance offers a synthesis of strategies to connect learning across the institution. Each chapter includes campus-based examples, offers best practices, or covers implications for practice and policy to support learning.

Throughout this volume, several key themes inform the research and writing. They include the following:

- An examination of various factors that contribute to learning for students, faculty, and organizations.
- A theoretical framework to analyze learning for and across groups of individuals and institutions.
- An examination of the underlying assumptions regarding critical factors that best scaffold learning.
- An emphasis on the influence of structure on learning.

This volume, thus, has both a scholarly and a practical bent. Professionals researching student learning, faculty development, or organizational learning will find useful takeaways. For scholars, the volume advances the knowledge about the ways we investigate and study learning across and for various groups of learners. Institutional leaders will benefit from this research as it collects thinking about learning in its various formats in one location and provides a platform for synthesis. Instead of thinking of learning as discrete depending on the stakeholder group, this volume highlights the commonalities across all types of learning. Many institutions are now undergoing various forms of curricular review to address the shifting nature of what student outcomes are desired from a college education. Similarly, faculty work is changing with new demands that push responsibilities, but the locus of work still centers on how to scaffold student learning. How faculty learn to do this is critical. Faculty developers will gain insights into this volume on how to best support faculty learning.

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Editor

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