

# **Student Engagement as a Learning Approach for the Up-and-Coming Generations**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper is based on student engagement as the process of learning and the responsibility of learning lies with the teacher. It is the teacher's responsibility to develop future leaders who are in the habit of looking at what is going on in the world, how to analyze what is going on, how they can apply knowledge to keep up with change and where they fit in. Ultimately, higher education must help future leaders realize that the decisions they make have an impact on them (Gosling, 2002). Unlike traditional teaching methods being used, today's schools of higher education have become more focused on the power of teaching and are taking steps to promote teaching assurance of learning. In other words, good teachers can transform the way students view the world. Good teachers can motivate students and release their potential. Therefore, motivation is about 80 percent of the teacher's job, and can be accomplished by creating a sense of community and culture in the classroom.

According to Raelin (2000), engagement-based learning is much more than the traditional experiential learning component in a student's learning process. He contends that experiential learning on the one hand such as the case approach that consists of adding a layer of simulated experience onto conceptual knowledge falls short when it comes to enhancement to the real world link. On the other hand, an engaged-based learning experience theory can be acquired in concert with practice. When in practice the learner builds theory as he or she consciously reflects on challenges of their practice, because they can engage in problem solving, data gathering, action, evaluation, and share that knowledge with others they are practicing with. Therefore, the connection between the instructor's transfer of a concept and the student's comprehension is best achieved through practice.

In Raelin's concept of Explicit vs. Tacit knowledge, he explains that explicit knowledge is transmitted in a formal systematic language such as a lecture. Tacit knowledge is deeply rooted in action and involvement such as doing. The results of explicit knowledge is the learner's conceptual understanding of a concept, whereas tacit knowledge represents the learner's skill in doing something, and that can be both mental or physical. The question here is can a student learn how to play a guitar through explicit knowledge without experiencing the tacit knowledge of holding the instrument, depressing the strings against the frets, and strumming the strings? Conventional learning methodologies tend to be theory-based classroom experiences relying on explicit knowledge. What then is the problem? Without the hands on experience, the learner can leave with the impression that problems are nestled into neat little packages as with questions

at the end of a case study or using a SWOT analysis as the only experience. For a business course, a SWOT would depict the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. In other courses, a SWOT would depict: Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and turning points to consider. What also needs to be considered is that students learn through engagement at an individual level and that actual experiences provide knowledge from challenges, making mistakes, problem solving, and taking action based on a decision made by the learner.

A potential learning environment should foster pedagogical components that encompass information, performance, situations, and hands-on engagement along with activities with other students, allowing them to exchange knowledge. This exchange of knowledge and interaction experience, coupled with students engaging with one another is reinforcement that results in personal learning. When students have the opportunity to freely exchange knowledge among themselves, it is empowering and allows them to engage freely with each other. Therefore, being actively engaged with the information, while gathering and learning will give them a comprehensive approach and help students to think critically. It must be kept in mind increasingly learning takes place in the classroom, as well as outside the classroom, Instructors need to adapt to physical and virtual educational environments that incorporates student engagement during the learning process in order to keep up with the current advances in education, (Jaleniauskiene and Juceviciene, 2015).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

When students are given the opportunity to engage in the learning process by actually experiencing it through an exercise, discussing the process with other students, and exchanging ideas on how it can be used, it is what Nelson (2016) would consider to be “Fully Active Learning.” He goes on to say, “Fully active learning means that 100% of students must be engaged at least 75% of the time.”

It is now becoming more prevalent for those in higher education to realize that learning beyond four walls is replacing the learning environment of many professors who experienced lecture style classes. Current and future learners are technically primed for interactive classrooms allowing them to engage in the learning process and with each other. They need the freedom to engage in an educational experience that require problem solving with perspectives beyond their own (Shinn, 2017).

Shinn (2017), points out that employers who allow employee to work from home enjoy the freedom to work at will without distractions such as commuting. That said, students experience the same benefits of being able to focus instantly, without distractions, as well. This concept has encouraged some universities to create dorm space for students to reside in living and learning environments with those students who have similar interests.

Kalantzis and Cope (2016), define learning as people ‘learning naturally’, which allows them to learn from living, growing, and having experiences. They call this natural phenomenon ‘informal learning’ or ‘everyday learning’. Teaching environments are about designing experiences for students to learn, otherwise known as ‘formal learning’ or ‘learning by design’. The advantage in a properly designed learning environment is formal learning accounts for and integrates informal learning into its patterns and routines. Actually, individuals never stop learning because they are born with an innate ability to learn. Therefore, learning happens as students engage with each other, interact within the environment, get exposed to concepts, problem solving, and most importantly get involved with hands on experiences. Reviewing the criteria of learning there are three components: a) change cannot take place without learning; b) over time, learning is maintained; c) experiences provide learning. Learning is a combination of experiences to alter behavior, which is the result of practice, (Schunk, 2016), therefore exploring the benefits of hands on and experiential experiences should be considered when preparing to teach the Z generation of students, keeping in mind they are visual and prefer physical learning applications engagement. Kalantzis and Cope (2016),

Educators in the not too distant future need to play a role in developing creative, productive, social individuals. A reconceptualization of the three R’s needs to be considered if contemporary changes to learning are to take place, whereby the new learning will be general in its focus, rather than a particular

need. Therefore, future students will be capable of adjusting to and causing change, problem solve, collaborate, and comprehend diversity. That said, new learning will be increasingly interdisciplinary, resulting into an intensified engagement with general knowledge, resulting into lifelong and life wide learning. All of us currently teaching must review the components of formal learning (Kalantzis and Cope, 2016):

- Deliberate and explicit
- Structured and goal oriented
- Analytical, abstracting and generalizing

Learning is the means for which humans acquire skills and knowledge, resulting into a long-term change in mental representations or associations that are the results of experiences. One can determine if learning has taken place by assessing the following (Ormrod, 2016):

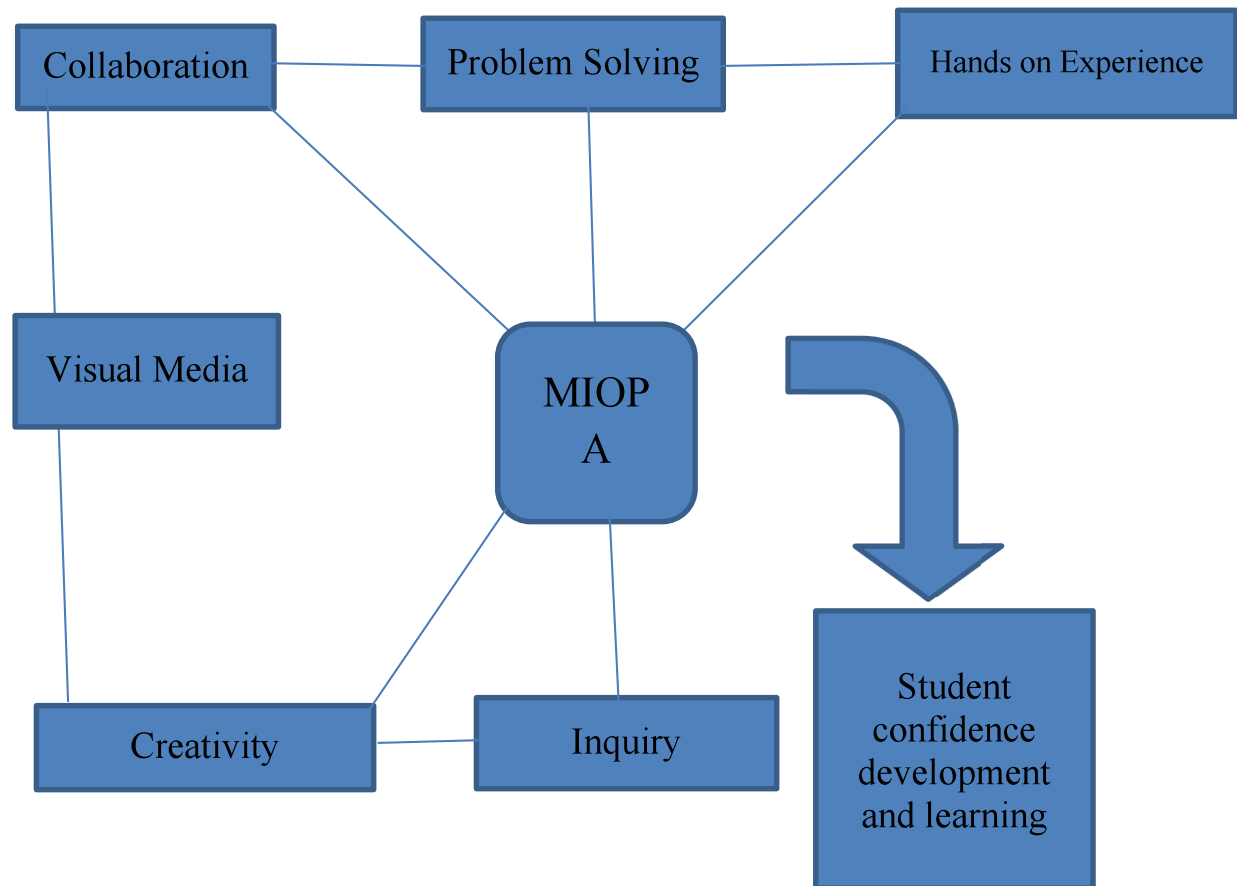
- A new behavior has been accomplished.
- Being able to recall information, facts and knowledge more quickly than previously.
- Being able to view and discuss a topic with more details.

All who teach in higher education today need to consider alternative teaching methods and approaches, and use effective course design to motivate and engage students in the learning process to gain cognitive knowledge that merge with the objectives of the course. When teachers employ student engaged lesson plans that cultivate students' cultural literacy, independent cognition, a macro-perspective and general knowledge students can utilize after graduation. These perspectives are becoming more and more significant, as well as interaction and exchange between teachers and students, along with student-to-student engagement. For teachers to consider adjusting teaching approaches according to the level of students and course objectives by incorporating, organization and planning of educationally engaging student activities that highlight the key points of the course, and stimulate student interest and cognition (Tsai, Yu-You, Hsu, Ming-Shan, 2012).

Steffers (2004), points out how non-traditional educational experiences help students cognitive learning inside the classroom when students are engaged in an effective teaching approach that creates a learning environment conducive to student learning. Engaging experiences enhance the learner's senses. The teacher's role is to assist students in bridging the gap between knowledge and practice and learning by doing is most effective. Research has indicated how the learning process often begins when carrying out an action. Then student can see and understand the effects of the action, and then modifying the action, if needed.

Active learning can be defined as a combination of teaching approaches, environment and technology, which supports learning that is student-centered to motivate them to actively take part in the learning process (e Campus News, 2017). For the purpose of this study, active learning classrooms will be referred to as "MIOPA," *multiple inclusions of pedagogical approaches*, which are a configuration of various pedagogical approaches to instill collaboration, problem solving, exercises such as hands on experiences, creativity, the value of inquiry learning, and the development of the learner's confidence. Figure 1 is an illustration of MIOPA:

**FIGURE 1**  
**MIOPA**



**Hypothesis 1:** *Students would enroll in another course that allowed them to engage with each other*

**Hypothesis 2:** *Students would prefer a course, which encourages them to interact with each other and the learning process.*

**Hypothesis 3:** *Students would prefer a course, which allows them to interact and engage with each other, rather than a traditional lecture approach.*

**Hypothesis 4:** *Students would gain an enhanced learning experience in a course taught with an engaging, interactive engaging approach.*

**Hypothesis 5:** *Students would prefer the flexibility of an engaging, interactive course that allowed them to choose how they would learn the concepts.*

## **THE METHOD**

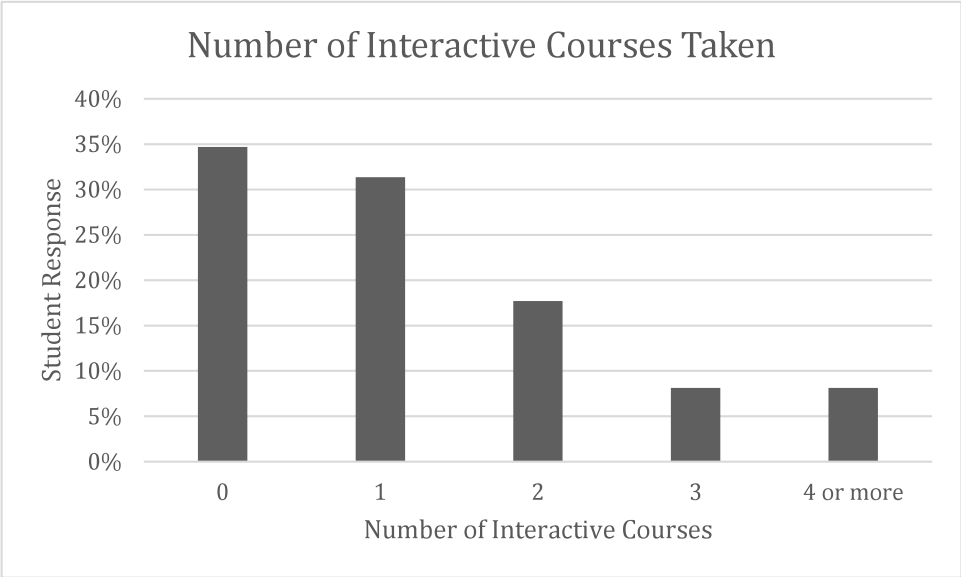
The class sizes ranged from 30 to 40 undergraduate students in each section with 60% female, 40% male, comprised with a diversity of Latino, Asian, and Black. The student's lectures were online. When in class, they were given a variety of activities to engage in, such as simulations, interacting with real world professionals, role playing, case studies and problem-solving issues. The course goals were for students to

choose the case studies they were interested in and design problem-solving activities. The class was divided into groups of 5 and no presentations were allowed. All cases and problem solving issues had to be demonstrated.

**RESULTS**

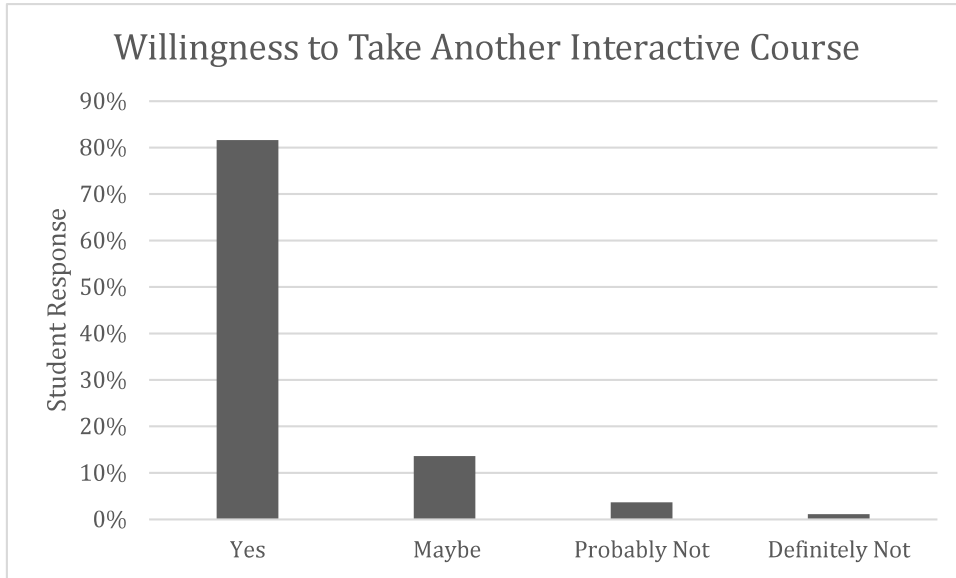
Data for this study was collected through an anonymous student survey. Data was collected during the fall semester of 2017 and the spring semester of 2018 at Monmouth University. In total, 275 students enrolled in several interactive courses in the School of Business and the School of Science responded to the survey. The authors of the study drew their students from different University department populations, generating a varied participant pool. The survey consisted of nine questions inquiring about student experience and preferences concerning interactive courses.

**FIGURE 2  
NUMBER OF INTERACTIVE COURSES TAKEN**



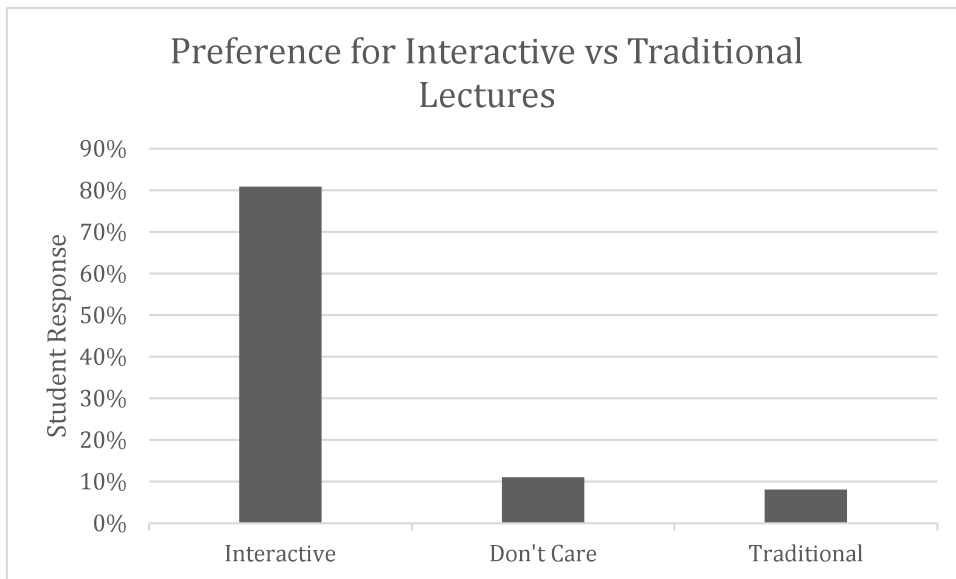
Analysis of the study data revealed that 34% of the respondents had never taken an interactive course prior to their current course load, while 65% of study participants had previously taken at least one interactive course prior to their current educational experience.

**FIGURE 3**  
**WILLINGNESS TO TAKE ANOTHER INTERACTIVE COURSE**



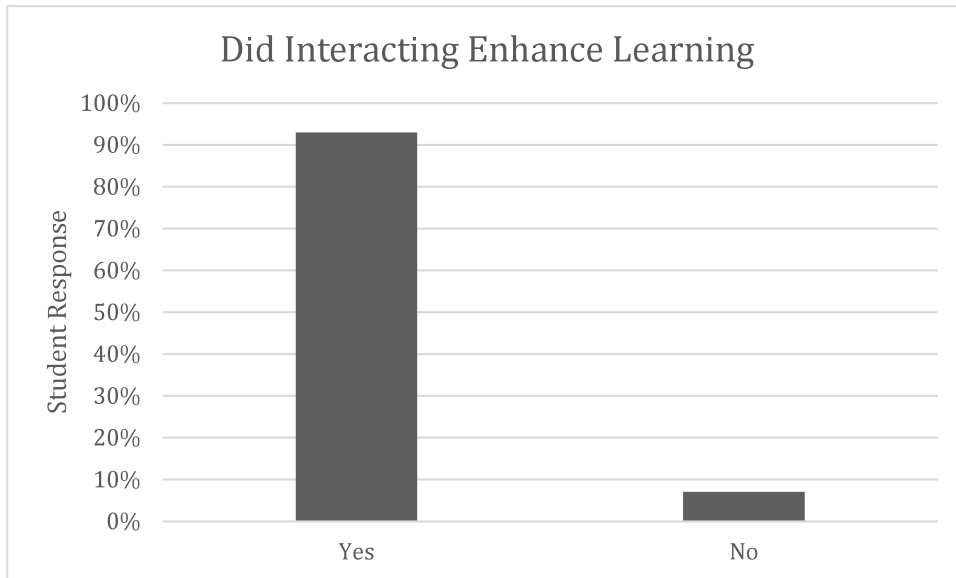
Ninety-five percent of students who were polled indicated that they would be or may be willing to take another interactive course in the future.

**FIGURE 4**  
**PREFERENCE FOR THE INTERACTIVE VS TRADITIONAL LECTURES**



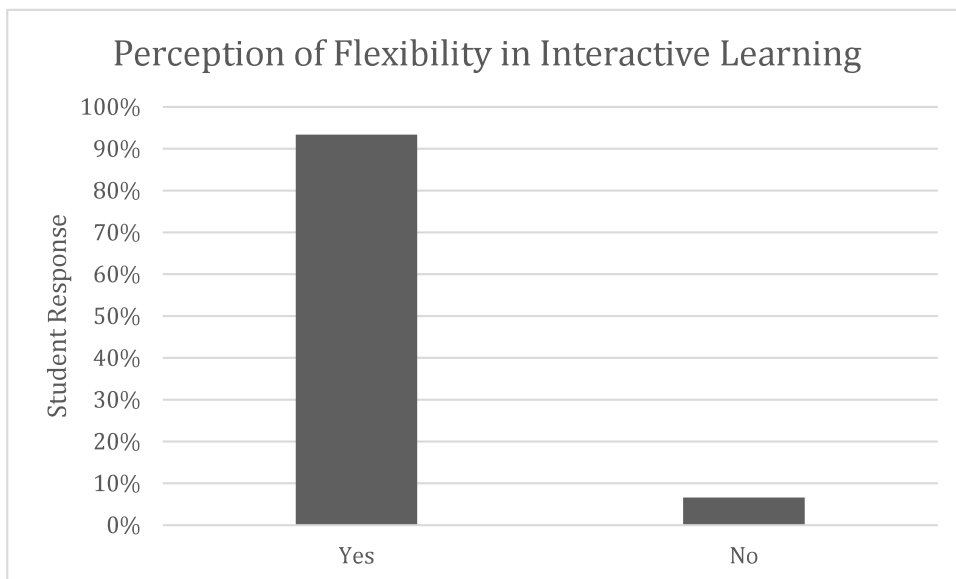
Eighty-one percent of survey respondents indicated they prefer interactive lectures to traditional ones.

**FIGURE 5**  
**DID INTERACTING ENHANCE LEARNING**



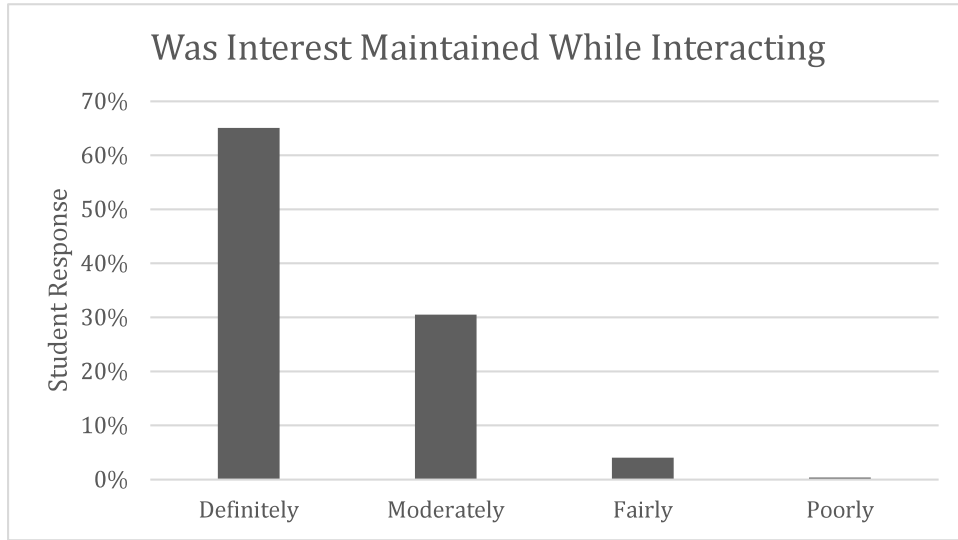
Ninety-three percent of students felt that the interactive course design enhanced their learning experience.

**FIGURE 6**  
**PERCEPTION OF FLEXIBILITY IN INTERACTIVE LEARNING**



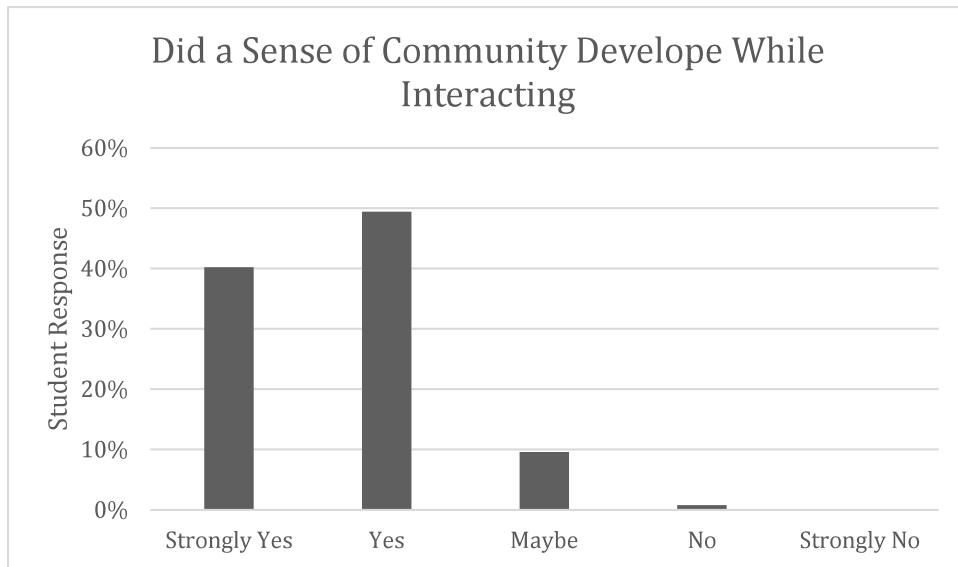
Ninety-three percent of students indicated that they like the flexible learning environment that accompanied the interactive courses.

**FIGURE 7**  
**WAS INTEREST MAINTAINED WHILE INTERACTING**



Ninety-six percent of survey participants expressed that their interest was moderately or definitely maintained while participating in an interactive course.

**FIGURE 8**  
**DID A SENSE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOP WHILE INTERACTING**



Ninety percent of participants indicated that the interactive course fostered a sense of community.

## **DISCUSSION**

The data indicate that the majority of students preferred or found benefit in interacting with their peers during class meetings as opposed to the traditional model of college education where students sit and take notes while the professor lectures. The authors suggest that using an integrated approach such as outlined



by multiple inclusions of pedagogical approaches (MIOPA) will not only appeal to students, but will also foster a learning environment conducive to student achievement.

The traditional college class setting primarily utilizes one pedagogical approach and primarily teaches to the auditory learners, or if purposefully animated/illustrated, the visual learners. This approach not only does not address the learning style of a significant portion of the student population it also does not prepare students for the work environment. Using multiple pedagogical approaches in an interactive course ensures that all learning styles are addressed and give students a sense of the teamwork they will most likely encounter in the workplace.

In the future, the authors will carry out a quantitative investigation on the effects a MIOPA instructional approach has on educational outcomes.

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