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## And Finally... Engagement

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# Engagement

**Michael Simonson**

**E**ngagement of a learner is defined as emotional and intellectual involvement or commitment—the participation in learning activities via interaction with others in meaningful ways. Engagement theory considers engagement as the process of involving learners in groups or teams working collaboratively on project-based and authentic activities.

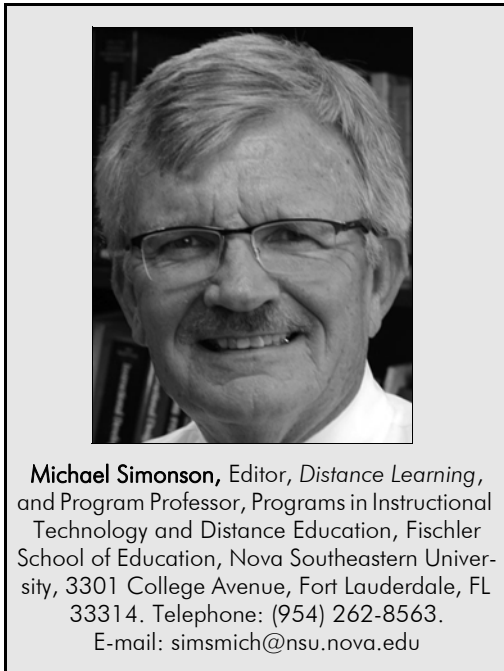
Engagement has other meanings, also. For example, an engagement is an agreement to marry. Engagements are hostile encounters between military forces, and

engaging is also the act of putting a manual automobile transmission in gear. Engagement is an often-used word important in a variety of contexts.

Okay, what do these definitions have in common? First, they involve more than one person—two people become engaged, armies are of hundreds or thousands, and transmission gears mesh in a predetermined way. Second, they are serious—marriages are to last a very long time, military engagements produce casualties and change people and places, and transmissions are engineering marvels. Finally, engagements are purposeful and result in something of significance or importance; two unite in marriage, armies fight and win battles, and cars with transmissions move more efficiently. Engagement and engaging are important.

Recently, the idea of engagement has become popular in distance education. When courses are planned, the best instructional designers talk to the subject matter experts—the teachers—about engaging the learner. Designers promote and emphasize instructional strategies that involve team activities, team assignments, and the idea of authenticity of learning events. Student engagement and engaging instruction are important. A purpose of engagement is to expect students to take responsibility for their own learning.

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Some techniques that engage learners are:

- Group projects. Students really do not like group projects, but some team learning in a class can promote engagement.
- Peer reviews of assignments. While instructors often say they do not like the use of peer reviews, once again, a modest use of this approach can bring students from isolation to partnerships.
- Multiple channels of communication. The use of a number of interaction activities is almost always popular, and promotes engagement.

Specific instructional activities include welcome audios and videos, interviews of classmates by classmates, systematic and regular communication such as the Monday Morning Memo, posting of assignments for class viewing, and group examinations.

One note: the use of social media to promote engagement in an online class may not be the best idea. Because social media promote social engagement, using these media for educational engagement may promote a frivolous aspect to the learning process. Certainly, more study of social media in online learning is needed.

*And finally*, to engage, first design, then present. Remember: as Euclid supposedly said, there is no royal road to learning.

ENGAGEMENT OF A LEARNER IS DEFINED AS EMOTIONAL AND INTELLECTUAL INVOLVEMENT OR COMMITMENT—THE PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING ACTIVITIES VIA INTERACTION WITH OTHERS IN MEANINGFUL WAYS.