This investigation studied student perceptions of learning and student engagement in college algebra. The study spanned two semesters and included three groups of students. The first group was presented with algebraic procedural examples and assessments without context. The second group was presented with algebraic class examples in contexts related to student majors and hobbies, but assessments without context. The third group was presented with class examples in contexts related to student majors and hobbies and also assessments with context.

Learning logs or student journals in this investigation were used to study student perceptions of learning. Student comments regarding learning progress were analyzed qualitatively, using grounded theory. Participation in completing learning logs also provided a measure of student engagement. Students in higher context groups had higher participation rates, Group 3 having 65% participation, Group 2 at 58% average participation, and Group 1 only averaging 36% of students returning learning logs. (Received September 22, 2010)