Much has been written in the past three decades about the failure of many students in colleges in the United States to show measurable improvement in their critical engagement with our information-rich twenty-first century environment, and about what "excellent" collegiate teaching should look like. What is lacking to make these arguments more compelling is a synthesis of the critical literature and research studies into a single model explicitly linked to our understanding of how young adults learn and develop. Here, I present such a model based upon three bodies of literature: recent critical evaluations of learning outcomes, core models of cognitive development and the behaviors of learning, and qualitative and quantitative studies of effective classroom practices. I end with a brief overview of the types of data that could be used to determine where professional development efforts would be most effective.