

Chapter 11

Teaching the Adult Learner: Building Trust and Motivation

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ABSTRACT

Several authors have discussed that the current structure of the educational system, geared to creating successful employees and consumers, is not adequate for the needs of today's students. Higher education continues to struggle. Today, it is imperative that higher education institutions find renewed confidence from public constituents. The emphasis on this chapter will be what faculty members can focus on to strengthen the learning and quality outcomes of instruction by developing trusting relationships with students and enhanced student motivation.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education stakeholders are constantly reminded of the external and internal forces impacting their institutions, and they are under strict scrutiny regarding how they meet these challenges. Recently, these forces have become formidable, questioning the core values of higher education. According to a recent Strada-Gallup (2017a) report, only a third of higher education students believe they will graduate with the skills and knowledge to be successful in the job market (34%) and in the workplace (36%). Another Strada-Gallup (2017) report of college graduates notes that only 22% strongly agree they had a mentor who encouraged their goals and dreams, and only 27% strongly agree they had a professor who cared about them personally during college (Busteed, 2017). This is further substantiated by Arum and Roksa (2011) as they state that higher education has done little to develop many students' critical thinking, complex reasoning and writing skills during the first two years of college. This begets the question: what can faculty do to better prepare students for future careers through developing deeper learning and increased skill sets? This poses great challenges to higher education administrators and faculty amidst the contemporary debate about the high and ever increasing cost of education (an increase of 400% in 30 years) and the parallel concern that quality and benefits do not justify the high cost. Hence, many

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Americans are questioning whether higher education is worth the inflated tuition price and time investment (Pew Research Center, 2011). Several authors posit that the current structure of the educational system, geared to creating successful employees and consumers, is not adequate for the needs of today's students (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Bangser, 2008). It is imperative that higher education institutions find renewed confidence from its public constituents. Seeking answers to these challenges, the emphasis on this chapter will be on what faculty members can do to strengthen the learning and quality outcomes of instruction by developing trusting relationships with students and enhanced student motivation.

A great deal of research has been conducted establishing the connection between high levels of trust and employee motivation and performance (Webb, 2007). When trust thrives in organizations, greater motivation and higher performance ensue. The author investigates whether the same results can be found in higher education settings focusing on adult learners. Using the definition from Chao (2009), an adult learner is someone who *"is a self-directed person, 24 years of age and above whose engagement and readiness to learn is based on the immediate applicability to the development tasks of his/her social role incorporating his/her reservoir of experience"* (p. 906). Will bringing trust and motivation into the classroom lead to deeper learning and more engaged adult learners? Does greater trust create the conditions to support greater student learning and growth? According to (Kahane, 2006), trust acts as a catalyst for learning while many factors influence students' levels of motivation.

The literature search begins with a discussion of trust and motivation in organizational and educational settings. A discussion of andragogy and teaching strategies that best meet the adult learners' needs follow. The Jacobs' model (Jacobs, 2012) is then introduced to explain how focusing on building trusting relationships in the higher education classroom leads to deeper learning and more engaged students.

TRUST

Kahane (2006) noted that Americans have low levels of trust in each other and in our institutions. A 2017 Gallup poll: Americans' Ratings of Honesty and Ethical Standards in Professions, shows a low and declining level of trust among American adults. For example, only 16% rated business executives very high in honesty and ethical standards. One would expect clergy to be rated very high, but their rating was only 42%, which is a cause for concern (Ethics Alarms, 2018). Trust is defined in various ways, depending on the context, and is considered to be a complex phenomenon (Byrk & Schneider, 2004; Romero, 2010). Trust has been variously describes as confidence, integrity, reliability, competence and a willingness to be vulnerable and take risks (Byrk & Schneider, 2004; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Huff, Cooper, and Jones (2001) define trust as one party's confident expectation that another party, on whom the trustor rely, will help the trustor reach his or her goals in an environment of risk and uncertainty (p. 25). A common understanding is that it describes people who share common cares and needs and who value trust in their relationships (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Trust in business often means an expectation that alleviates the fear of opportunism (Braddock & Eccles, 1989). Stephen Covey notes that, "Financial success comes from success in the market place, and success in the marketplace comes from success in the workplace. The heart and soul of all of this is trust" (as cited by Jacobs, 2013, para. 8).

We feel that we uphold each other's truths and confidences through trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Furthermore, trust is based on interpersonal dependence and involves an individual and group willingness' to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the party is benevolent, reliable, competent

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