

Chapter 14

Building Bridges for Success: Enhancing Educator–Student Relationships in Adult Education

ABSTRACT

The quality of educator-student relationships is a cornerstone of successful teaching and learning, especially within the context of adult education. This research explores the importance of building positive, trust-based relationships between educators and students through the application of the Kaupapa Wananga Model of Practice (KWMP). The aim of this study is to foster stronger communication channels and more meaningful connections between educators and their future adult learners, ultimately enriching the educational experience. Conducted as Classroom Action Research (CAR), the study progressed through five phases: planning, implementation, observation, reflection, and evaluation. Each phase was meticulously documented, ensuring comprehensive data collection from various sources, including classroom observations, students' practicum work, and final presentations of their teaching philosophies, grounded in the Ako-Based Practice Framework.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings, at their core, are relational creatures who thrive in environments that foster engagement, connection, and a sense of belonging. As an adult educator, I have often asked myself, *What is the purpose of building relationships with my students? What are the desired outcomes of these relationships, and how do they influence my teaching philosophy and practices?* These questions guide my educational approach, as I believe that the foundation of effective teaching lies in

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the ability to connect with students on a personal level. Establishing meaningful relationships is not just about creating a friendly atmosphere; it is about placing students at the heart of the learning process, nurturing their sense of belonging, and empowering them to succeed both academically and professionally.

Building relationships with students is not merely a tool for teaching; it is an invitation to them to join a community—an academic community where their presence matters. Within this community, students are not passive recipients of knowledge but active participants who contribute, collaborate, and grow. The concept of academia as a community serves as a powerful framework for fostering meaningful connections between students and educators. It creates a space where students can see themselves as integral members of a learning environment that values their contributions, encourages their engagement, and supports their development. The sense of belonging that arises from such a community nurtures both students' confidence and their commitment to their educational journey.

In my role as an educator, my goal is to cultivate such a community, one where students feel welcomed, respected, and valued. I view my classroom as a dynamic, interactive space—a place where relationships are the foundation of academic success. By providing students with an engaging and supportive learning environment, I aim to empower them to take ownership of their learning, develop critical skills, and prepare for success in their careers.

This chapter presents a reflective exploration of the Kaupapa Wananga Model of Practice (KWMP), a framework I have utilized to foster positive educator-student relationships. Through this model, I have sought to create a space where both students and educators engage in a reciprocal process of learning, growth, and collaboration. By reflecting on my experiences with this model, I aim to highlight the transformative power of building meaningful connections in the classroom and its impact on student success.

LITERATURE REVIEW - WHY BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

A myriad of research has been conducted documenting the effect of educator-student relationships on the achievement of students both academically and on other aspects of their lives. Reeve (2006) posited that the more educators are supportive to their students, the more engaged and comfortable students are in the classroom i.e. leading to positive relationships. Brown and Starrett (2017) reiterated that stu-

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