Chapter 3

Creating University Spaces of Inspiration: Examining the Critical Link Between Leading and Lecturing

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ABSTRACT

Our review and research examines the power bases and influences university lecturers can deploy to motivate their students to learn. Lecturers are in similar situations as leaders, that is, to be successfully they must secure scarce resources. In other words, lecturers must convince students to deploy their scarce resources of time and effort to the task of learning. The research examines which (a) workplace ideas can be applied to a university learning space, (b) key environmental influences, (c) the core influence tactic to gain and influence the attention of students, (d) the supplementary tactics to gain and influence the attention of students, and finally, (e) five case studies are present which demonstrate how space for inspiration can be created. This research attempts to provide an in-depth understanding of how power and influence exist in the learning environment and can be used to create university space for inspiration. Simply put, for inspiration to occur the politics and environment must be enabling rather than inhibiting.

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INTRODUCTION

The creation of university spaces where inspiration can occur requires a deeper understanding of power and influence and the critical link between leading and lecturing. Ignoring the role of power and influence in the learning environment suggests that lecturers and their students are not engaged in a continual negotiation of what constitutes their shared reality, regarding shared meaning, ideologies, motivation, and identities (see Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011; Hogg, 2001). Such aspects absolutely impact learning strategies and approaches and play a critical role in the interactions between lecturer and student, which are basically a particular type of social exchange. Such exchanges are evident in a range of situations, from the sports field to the workforce. Research into power and influence within the workforce has a long and prominent history which has focused on understanding the capacity to produce effects on others (House, 1977) or the potential to influence (Bass, 1990). French and Raven (1959) developed a taxonomy that identified social power, which consisted of five sources of power (i.e., expert power, referent power, legitimate power, reward power, coercive power). These sources of power exist in every social situation where parties seek to gain influence beyond what they can directly control. Since power is in the eye of the beholder (Lewicki, Barry, Saunders, & Minton, 2003), gaining power is about being perceived as powerful, which creates leverage over someone else. Such a perception can be created and may, in fact, be an illusion in the mind of someone. The key to understanding power and influences is to appreciate how the perception of power is created.

A traditionally and somewhat ‘romantic’ view of the classroom is one of power dominance by the lecturer with their student in a dependency relationship with them. However, in the modern class or learning environments, we more readily accept that both lecturers and students exert power over each other and at the same time and exist in a co-dependency relationship. Emerson (1962) highlights the importance of mutual dependency in understanding power and influence. Mutual dependency is the recognition that each party can deny, facilitate or hinder the other’s gratification. While the power bases and dependency relationships are different for the lecturer and their students the exertion or perceived effort is very real. For example, both are in a position of influencing the other through their feedback and ranking. While how and what they are trying to influence may be different (e.g., academic/learning ratings versus teaching satisfaction ratings) they are obviously inter-related. Research into such relationships within the workplace has a long history, and scholars have dedicated a significant amount of energy to understand the role of influence (Mowday, 1978; Wayne, Liden, Graf, & Ferris, 1997; Yukl & Falbe, 1990). The higher education learning space “is like any other workplace, [it] is a social organization where power is asserted, tasks are assigned and negotiated, and work is accomplished through the interplay of formal and informal social structures” (Weaver & Qi, 2005, p. 579).
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